

UNIVERSITY OF DERBY

TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES: GENDER,  
IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND 'OTHER' IN  
POSTCOLONIAL WOMEN'S NARRATIVES IN  
AFRICA

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## Abstract

Fictions written between 1939 and 2005 by indigenous and white (post)colonial women writers who emerge from an African/European cultural experience form the focus of this study. Their voyages into the European diasporic space in Africa within the context of their texts are important since they speak of how African women's literature develops from, and is situated in relation to colonialism.

African literature constitutes one facet of the new literatures in English from formerly colonised countries. However, the accomplishments of indigenous writer Grace Ogot are eclipsed by the critical acclaim received by her male counterparts, whilst Elspeth Huxley, Barbara Kimenye and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, who emanate from Western culture but adopt an African perspective, are not accommodated by the 'expatriate literature' genre. Hence, indigenous and white (post)colonial women's narratives by authors issuing from an African/European cultural experience are brought together to foreground European influence as an apparent phenomenon common to both categories of writers, with consequences for the representation of gender, identity, culture and the 'Other'.

The selected texts are set in Kenya and Uganda, and a main concern is with the extent to which the works are impacted upon by setting and intercultural influences. However, this thesis argues that the 'African' woman's creation of textuality is at once the formulation and expression of female individualities and a transgression of boundaries. Furthermore, Kimenye and Macgoye's children's literature illustrates the representation and configuration of a voice and identity for the female 'Other' and writer, which enables a re-negotiation of identity and subsequently a crossing of borders.

No critical study combines indigenous and white settler women's fiction written from an African perspective and therefore this study extends current scholarly knowledge. Whilst the combination of texts together with the disparate (post)colonial backgrounds is unique, the study of Kimenye and Macgoye's African children's narratives in particular breaks new ground since there is currently no critical comparative study pertaining to indigenous and white postcolonial women's children's literature with an African perspective.



# Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Identity, Culture and the 'Other' in Postcolonial Women's Narratives in Africa

## INTRODUCTION

Kadiatu Kanneh affirms that 'Africa remains unbeloved of modern postcolonial theory'.<sup>1</sup> Yet Africa has the potential to be regarded as both a frontier and a fiction frontier, with indigenous and white 'African' postcolonial women writers' new identities and new notions of civilisation meeting in the 'Third Space' of 'cultural difference'.<sup>2</sup> Kanneh goes on to say; 'the silence surrounding Africa in theoretical writing beyond African Marxisms or the modern South African state suggests a reluctance to engage with the practicality of the anthropological questions that dog theory'.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, through my engagement with the problems surrounding 'race', identity, legitimacy of voice and cultural differences it is precisely this reluctance my research attempts to address.

This study argues that the 'African' woman's act of writing is simultaneously the creation of women's identities and a transgression of boundaries. The focus is on fiction written between 1939 and 2005 by Elspeth Huxley, Barbara Kimenye, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye and Grace Ogot: indigenous and white (post)colonial women writers who emerge from an African/European cultural experience. Their literary voyages into the European diaspora in Africa and the impingement of history on their writing are important since they speak of and situate their writing in relation to colonialism. In my view, the subjects of this thesis are bound together by their (un)conscious voyages into the European diasporic spaces in Africa, which will be illustrated by the selected works. The representation of gender, identity, culture, and the 'Other' will be analysed in chosen texts and I will demonstrate how the writers' texts 'offer the kinetic energy necessary for social transition and change.'<sup>4</sup> Achebe argues that being an African is not a matter of colour.<sup>5</sup> By implication, the 'African'

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<sup>1</sup> Kadiatu Kanneh, 'History, 'Africa' and Modernity', in *Interventions*, Vol. 1 (1) (1998), pp. 30 – 34, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994; repr. 2006), pp. 53 – 56 & pp.232-233.

<sup>3</sup> Kanneh, p.31.

<sup>4</sup> Chinua Achebe, 'What Has Literature Got to Do with It?' (1986), *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1988; New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1990), pp. 154 – 170 (p. 167).

<sup>5</sup> Achebe, 'Thoughts on the African Novel' (1973), *Hopes and Impediments*, pp. 91 – 99 (pp. 92 – 93).

woman writer is not inevitably indigenous or black: rather she is one who was either born, or lived/lives and identifies with the native black African woman and thereby adopts and privileges an African perspective. This informs my choice of writers and theoretical framework, for the writers' identities forge an inextricable link with the notion of the 'stranger' and its etymology; this in turn is linked with its binary opposite, 'indigenous', and the notion of the transgression of boundaries.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, this thesis investigates the ways in which the writers transgress boundaries of gender, identity and culture, and any impingement of the European diaspora/colonial Empire in Africa. Key concepts to be interrogated include identity, black, race, African woman, stranger, indigenous, boundaries, space, Third Space, contact zone, postcolonialism, feminism, nego-feminism, culture and 'Other'.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, I explore the extent to which the woman 'Other' uses children's voices to transgress the boundaries of women's traditional use of words in the configuration of identity.

## **Biographies**

In order to familiarise readers with the subjects of this study, a brief biography of each writer is included below.

### **(i) Elspeth Josceline Huxley**

Known for her writing about Africa, particularly her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Flame Trees of Thika* (1959), Elspeth Josceline Huxley (née Grant, 1907 – 1997), the 'chronicler of colonial Kenya', was married in 1931 to Gervas Huxley, a grandson of Thomas Huxley and a cousin of Aldous Huxley, with whom she had one son, Charles, born in 1944.<sup>8</sup> Born into an aristocratic family in England on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1907, in the winter of 1912 her parents, who had never farmed before, were inspired to invest what little capital they had in growing coffee in Kenya - then known as the

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<sup>6</sup> My use of these terms will be explained in full in the main body of the thesis.

<sup>7</sup> Nego-feminism is a style of feminism currently evolving in Africa. Obioma Nnaemeka refers to it as a "no-ego" feminism' that challenges patriarchal systems through negotiation, compromise and accommodation. See Obioma Nnaemeka, 'Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way', in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29:2 (2004), 357 – 385 (p. 377). For further explanation of nego-feminism and the other terms see Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Lyall, 'Elspeth Huxley, 89, Chronicler of Colonial Kenya, Dies' *The New York Times* 18 January 1997.



British East Africa Protectorate. They bought five hundred acres of land close to the Gikuyu reserve near Chania Bridge – later Thika – and called their farm Kitimuru, after the stream running through it. Huxley enjoyed life in Africa and spent the majority of her childhood in Kenya.<sup>9</sup>

Huxley's education was varied. She was educated by a governess prior to boarding at a small school for white children in Nairobi until the age of seven when she returned to England during the First World War. Her education continued at Belstead Boarding School, which she loathed, and where her familiarity with British East Africa proved that, she 'had the colonial child's characteristic ignorance of British topography'.<sup>10</sup> She was expelled in 1920 for running a horse-related betting syndicate and returned to Kenya where she was home-educated before attending the government European school, Nairobi High School, to prepare for her entrance to university. In 1925, she left Kenya to study at the University of Reading, England and Cornell University in the United States. After leaving Africa at the age of eighteen, although Huxley took regular extended visits and travelled the continent widely during her life, she never lived there again.

With the commissioning of her first book, the biography of Hugh Cholmondeley, the third Baron Delamere, *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya* (1935), Huxley became widely regarded as 'the veritable proponent of British imperialism in Africa'.<sup>11</sup> The book was a huge success with European readers, possibly due to her representation of the colonial view of Kenya. It came to be perceived as 'the standard history of European settlement in Kenya'.<sup>12</sup> Huxley regarded Delamere as the founding father of the white man's modern Kenya, but her experience of writing *White Man's Country* prompted her to discover more about the effect of colonisation upon the indigenous people of Kenya and in particular, the Gikuyu. She spent a month living in the Gikuyu reserve, read Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* (1938), and took an anthropological course at the London School of Economics. Her efforts resulted in *Red Strangers* (1939), wherein Huxley represents four generations of a Gikuyu family

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<sup>9</sup> Throughout this thesis I use the correct form "Gikuyu". Where the spelling "Kikuyu" appears its employment is not mine.

<sup>10</sup> C.S. Nicholls, *Elspeth Huxley: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> G.W. Burnett, 'Red Strangers', *Journal of Third World Studies*, Fall (2002), pp. 289 – 290, p. 289.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Bull, 'Huxley, Elspeth Josceline' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

< <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/printable/64695> > accessed 15th November 2005, para. 2 of 6.



spanning the years from pre-colonialism up to the late 1930s. Whereas the colonial perspective was to view their intervention as benign and civilising, rescuing indigenous Africans from primitive structures, Huxley demonstrated by writing from the Gikuyu perspective that they had systems and logical methods of doing things prior to the arrival of the colonisers. G.W. Burnett confirms that the text 'makes the British and their imperialism appear absolutely alien, ridiculous, and even comic, were it not so tragic'.<sup>13</sup> *Red Strangers* can be regarded as an overt attempt by Huxley to educate Europeans about indigenous peoples' lives and customs prior to colonisation, but her position in England as the spokesperson of British settlers in Kenya was further reinforced by the publication of *Race and Politics in Kenya* (1944). Considering Huxley's desire, which grew out of her researching of *Red Strangers*, to see the education of Africans in order for them to undertake eventually their own self-government, in this text she paradoxically argues for more power to be given to the settlers who are *au fait* with conditions in Kenya, particularly in connection with affairs relating to Africans. Hence, settlers in Africa viewed her as a potentially dangerous radical, whilst in Britain she was still perceived as a colonialist. After the war, she was requested to conduct an investigation into the supply of reading materials for Africans and the strength of her arguments in the report was such that it resulted in the establishment of the East Africa Literature Bureau.

In 1959, Huxley's most popular text, *The Flame Trees of Thika*, was published. A combination of memories and fiction, the work is based upon two years of Huxley's childhood spent in the white settler community in central Kenya. It made her famous worldwide, and in 1981, a six-part TV adaptation of *Flame Trees* awakened the interest of a new audience and boosted book sales further. In 1985 *Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya* appeared. Written by Huxley as a way of setting the record straight with regard to the behaviour of the 'Happy Valley Crowd' depicted in James Fox's *White Mischief* (1983), it is an account of the life of the European colonial pioneers in Kenya between the two World Wars.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> G.W. Burnett, 'Red Strangers', *Journal of Third World Studies*, Fall (2002), pp. 289 – 290, p. 289.

<sup>14</sup> The 'Happy Valley Crowd' - aristocratic expatriates who settled in the Kenyan 'White Highlands', in the process moving indigenous Africans off their farmland, who were then forced to work for the Europeans on their coffee plantations and as servants. Fox portrays the 'Happy Valley Crowd' as living an idle life of decadence and debauchery, passing the time engaging in adulterous affairs, drinking alcohol and taking drugs while being waited on hand and foot by numerous black servants.



Huxley's views regarding colonialism changed with age 'until she concluded that the sooner the whites left Kenya the better'.<sup>15</sup> However, her position as a writer preoccupied with Africa is paradoxical. She is simultaneously regarded as the voice of colonial Kenya, and yet criticised for 'consider[ing] herself an African, like so many other white settlers in the fertile, comfortable highlands the British had taken away from the Gikuyu in Kenya' by indigenous African writers and critics such as Chinua Achebe.<sup>16</sup> Although guilty of adopting the colonial perspective in many of her works, I will analyse the extent to which Huxley tries to redress the balance by representing Africans from a Gikuyu perspective.

## (ii) Barbara Kimenye

A prolific writer widely regarded as 'the leading writer of Children's literature in Uganda', Barbara Kimenye is among the first Anglophone Ugandan women writers to be published in Central and East Africa.<sup>17</sup> Her stories are extensively read in Uganda and beyond and have been widely used in African schools.

Kimenye was born of mixed parentage in Yorkshire, England, on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1929, but considers herself Ugandan by birth. Little is known about her early life, but she has been quoted as saying that such details 'have no bearing' upon her career as a writer, and she is therefore reluctant to go into too much detail.<sup>18</sup> It is known that she was educated at a convent school in Yorkshire; later, Kimenye studied nursing at Hammersmith, London, where she met and married her Tanzanian husband prior to moving to Uganda in the early 1950s. Here she adopted the role of housewife and mother to her two sons before becoming private secretary for the Government of the Kabaka of the Kingdom of Buganda. Although Kimenye put together her first newspaper at the age of eleven and feels that writing is something she has done throughout her life, she admits to drifting into her career as a journalist because of a chance meeting in a Ugandan nightclub with Tom Mboya. Her first journalistic role

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<sup>15</sup> Nicholls, p.xiv.

<sup>16</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Abasi Kiyimba, "Cultural Dialogue and the Language of the Neighbour's Child: Lessons from Barbara Kimenye's Writing", *No Child is an Island: The Case for Children's Literature in Translation* ed. by Pat Pinsent (Lichfield, Staffordshire: Pied Piper, 2006), pp. 239 – 252, (p. 239).

<sup>18</sup> Janheinz Jahn, Ulla Schild, and Almut Nordmann, *Who's Who in African Literature: Biographies, Work, Commentaries* (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1972), p. 176.



was that of columnist for the *Uganda Nation* newspaper; later she became widely known as a journalist and women's feature editor for the *Daily Nation* of Kenya. Kimenye was the first black woman journalist in East Africa.

In 1965, Kimenye's first collection of short stories, *Kalasanda*, was published and the following year she published *Kalasanda Revisited* (1966). The collections are based on the Buganda village of Namusera, and offer a social commentary on those who are generally ignored: ordinary people living in an African village wrapped up in their day-to-day activities. Writing as an insider, her strength resides in her understanding of, and ability to represent diverse characters and the world they live in with humour, thereby highlighting that they 'are actually full of interest'.<sup>19</sup> Whilst they are suggestive of Kimenye's awareness of contemporary Ugandan life, her preoccupation is not with writing about the changes affecting African society and their associated effects upon her characters, however. Consequently, she is defined by Peter Nazareth as an, 'uncommitted writer' yet also one who 'is of particular value to us'.<sup>20</sup> Although the stories are not political in the style of Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's writing, Kimenye can still be considered to be writing back to colonialism, albeit in a gentle, covert manner. Nevertheless, she is criticized for displaying a 'very kizungu [European] imagination'.<sup>21</sup> When asked about European influences adversely affecting her representation of Baganda village life, Kimenye simply confirms that much in the *Kalasanda* books is based on real events in both Namusera and Mengo.<sup>22</sup> The collections are still in demand today and in 1994 the story 'The Battle of the Sacred Tree' was made into a feature film in Kenya.

Kimenye's focus then switched to children's literature. The major factor determining her decision was the absence of relevant stories for African children written in English from an African perspective. Her first publications were *The Smugglers* (1966) and *Moses* (1967). *The Smugglers*, a story about three school boys who encounter a group of criminals in the forest, was published in response to the publishers Thomas Nelson's request that she write an African school reader. Its popularity is such that it has never been out of print in Africa, while the hugely

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<sup>19</sup> Nazareth, Peter, *An African View of Literature* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 171.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.167 and p.166.

<sup>21</sup> F.B. Welbourne, "Buganda Corrections", *Transition*, 25 (1966), pp. 7 – 8, (p. 8).

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Kimenye, unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye, 6 July 2006.

successful *Moses* developed into a whole series. Moving back to England in the 1970s, Kimenye had a period of inactivity as she found she was uninspired to write when living away from Africa. Upon her return, she wrote *The Mating Game* (1992), *The Runaway Bride* (1994) and *Kayo's House* (1995), which deal with issues relating to marriage and education, and modern/traditional African women. *Prettyboy, Beware* (1997) and *Beauty Queen* (1997) deal with the more serious contemporary issue of HIV and Aids, and 'cannot be dismissed off-hand simply because their primary audience is children'.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Kiyimba refers to Kimenye 'as the pioneer and leading writer of children's literature in Uganda' thereby highlighting that her importance should not be underestimated.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, she has not written since her move back to England in 1999.

### (iii) Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye

Defined as 'one of the country's [Kenya] most important literary figures and, in the words of a leading Kenyan critic, a "national treasure"',<sup>25</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye is a white woman who was born on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1928 in Southampton, England, into a working class family. She went to Sholing Girls' School and Eastleigh County High School before becoming one of the first students to gain a university place because of her academic achievements as opposed to her background and connections. At university, she became a member of the Student Christian Movement, and left the Royal Holloway College (University of London) in 1948 with a B.A. in English.

After graduating, Macgoye began writing whilst working as a cashier and bookseller in London. Additionally, she studied Yoruba in preparation for an expected visit to Nigeria as a missionary, and completed an M.A. in English at Birbeck College (University of London). In 1954, at the age of twenty-six, Macgoye went to work with the Christian Missionary Society in Nairobi. She remained in Kenya where she met Daniel Oludhe Macgoye to whom she became unofficially engaged in 1958: they married at St. John's (Anglican) Church in Pumwani on June

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<sup>23</sup> Kiyimba, p.244.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.249.

<sup>25</sup> J. Roger Kurtz, *Nyarloka's Gift: The Writing of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye* (Nairobi: Mvule Africa Publishers, 2005), p. 1.



4<sup>th</sup> 1960.<sup>26</sup> Since migrating to Kenya, Macgoye has immersed herself into Kenyan life, becoming fully integrated into Daniel's Luo family, adopting an African centred perspective, and refusing the privileges accorded to whites in Kenya because of its colonial history. Shortly after Kenya received independence from Britain in 1963, she became a nationalised Kenyan; but with regard to her identity, Macgoye herself writes 'You can identify me as a national, but I cannot identify myself'.<sup>27</sup> Hence, as a nationalised Kenyan writer rather than a Kenyan indigenous writer, and writing from an African point of view with African concerns in mind, Macgoye's writing does not fit into the category defined as 'expatriate literature', which comprises works that delineate growing up in a settler community, the like of Huxley's *The Flame Trees of Thika* and Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1938). Rather, her collection of poetry, *Song of Nyarloka and Other Poems* (1977), and novels such as *Coming to Birth* (1986) and *The Present Moment* (1987), for example, are written from an insider's perspective and recreate and explore Luo experiences, clearly pointing to her occupation of a Third Space.

Macgoye's fiction can possibly be more accurately defined as 'faction', since she writes stories about 'ordinary Kenyans [set] against the backdrop of Kenya's historic events'.<sup>28</sup> Thus, persistent themes running through her writing are the challenges faced by women in an ever-changing Africa, and the forging of a national consciousness. Beginning her literary career by writing poetry, Macgoye has also published eight novels, in addition to children's books including *The Black Hand Gang* books and *Growing up at Lina School* (1971), short stories, essays and articles, cultural criticism, and historical studies. Her success is such that her audience ranges from schoolchildren to graduates. Hence, Roger Kurtz states, 'on the basis of artistic accomplishments alone, Macgoye ranks in the top tier of first-generation writers from East Africa, alongside other leading figures like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Grace Ogot, and Okot p'Bitek'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.xi.

<sup>27</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Make it Sing & Other Poems* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1998), p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Kurtz, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

#### (iv) Grace Ogot

Regarded as 'one of Africa's leading women achievers', Grace Ogot writes in both English and Luo and was the first Kenyan female writer to gain international interest.<sup>30</sup> In 1963, her first short stories appeared in *Black Orpheus*, making her the first Anglophone Kenyan female writer to be published.

Ogot was born on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1930 to Christian parents in the conventional Luo stronghold of Asembo Kabondo, Butere, near Kisumu in the Central Nyanza district of rural western Kenya. Her father was one of the first in Asembo to receive a Western education and he became a teacher at the Church Missionary Society Ng'iya Girls' School. Exposed from an early age to cultural differences, Ogot grew up surrounded by her father's Bible stories and the traditional Luo myths and stories told by her grandmother, which she credits as influencing her writing.<sup>31</sup> Ogot was educated at Maseno Junior School, Ng'iya Girls' School and Butere Girls' High School. Between 1949 and 1953, she trained as a nurse in Mengo near Kampala, Uganda, before going to St Thomas Hospital for Mothers and Babies in London, England. In 1958, she returned to Maseno where she was a Nursing Sister and Midwifery Tutor at Maseno Hospital - which was run by the Church Missionary Society - until 1959. She then worked at the Student Health Service at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda, where her Luo husband, Professor Bethwell Alan Ogot whom she married in 1959, was a lecturer in History. In the same year, Ogot travelled to England with her husband in order for him to complete his PhD. Thus, from 1960 to 1961 she worked as a scriptwriter and broadcaster for the Overseas Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation in London on the program *London Calling East and Central Africa*: subsequently she was granted her own weekly radio program in Luo, which was widely acclaimed. Ogot returned to Kenya, and from 1961 to 1962, she worked as a Community Development Officer and Principal of the Women's Training Centre in Kisumu. She spent the following year at Makerere University College again, this time as nursing sister, prior to becoming a Public Relations Officer for the Air India Corporation of East Africa in Nairobi,

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<sup>30</sup> Kuria, Mike, *Talking Gender: Conversations with Kenyan Women Writers* (Nairobi: PJ, 2003), p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> Ogot, Grace, in Lindfors, Bernth, (ed) *Mazungumzo: Interviews with East African Writers, Publishers, Editors and Scholars* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1980), p. 123.



Kenya. Over the years, Ogot additionally fulfilled the role of mother to her three children, and, encouraged by her husband who 'insisted that my letters to him were not letters at all but poetry', began publishing her writing.<sup>32</sup> In 1975, Ogot acted as the Kenyan delegate to the General Assembly of the United Nations, and in 1976 in acknowledgement of her flourishing writing career, she was selected to act as one of the Kenyan delegation to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation). In 1983, she served as a nominated member of parliament in Kenya and in 1985 was elected to represent Gem, her husband's birthplace. In 1988, President Moi appointed her to his cabinet as Assistant Minister for Culture and Social Services. She held her parliamentary seat until the multiparty elections in 1992. Ogot believes she lost her seat 'because she ran on a KANU [Kenya African National Union] ticket, the ruling party, in an opposition dominated western Kenya'.<sup>33</sup> Hence, in her political career, Ogot occupies the 'in-between space' of a woman in a predominantly male world the like of which she represents in *The Graduate* (1980).<sup>34</sup> Yet in her writing, she also represents pre-colonial traditional Luo culture, which effectively situates her in the Third Space between modern and traditional Kenya. Consequently, F.B. Welbourn said that one of Ogot's strengths as a writer is that 'she manages to write from the inside of traditional Luo society, so that it comes to life in a wholly new way'.<sup>35</sup>

### Historical Background

The key texts are set in Kenya and Uganda, and a main concern is with the extent to which the works are impacted upon by setting and intercultural influences. The themes of the collective works reflect and span a period that saw much social and political upheaval in Africa: 1890-2005. The population in these countries experienced in varying degrees the effects of colonialism, the rise of nationalism, independence, and the turmoil associated with post-independence. A brief summary of the socio-political histories of Kenya and Uganda is included here in order to

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<sup>32</sup> Ogot in Bernth Lindfors, p. 123.

<sup>33</sup> Kuria, p.71.

<sup>34</sup> Bhabha, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Welbourn, F.B., in Jahn, Janheinz Jahn, Ulla Schild & Almut Nordmann, *Who's Who in African Literature: Biographies, Works, Commentaries* (Tübingen, Germany: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1972), p. 290.

contextualize the writers and their texts and to enable an assessment of how socio-political history informs their literary works.

In 1895, the British government declared a protectorate over Kenya. The effect of colonialism on the African natives was to dispossess thousands of their farmlands by opening the fertile highlands to white farmers attracted by the economic opportunities, and displaced Africans were forced to work on the British farms. Harry Thuku founded the Young Gikuyu Association to recover the appropriated Gikuyu land and assert African rights. His subsequent arrest by the British for the encouragement of the Gikuyu rebellion culminated in the 'Nairobi Massacre': British reaction to the Africans' protest resulted in their killing of twenty-five Africans. Lack of progress relating to issues of racial discrimination fed the nationalist spirit, and the subsequent fierce Gikuyu Mau Mau uprising was in response to sixty years of gradually more damaging British policies.<sup>36</sup> A state of emergency was declared in Kenya from October 1952 until December 1959. Independence was won in 1963, and, in general, for the fifteen years of Jomo Kenyatta's Presidential office, political and economic stability returned. However, Daniel Toroitich arap Moi's oppressive presidential period (1978-2002) resulted in Kenya's endurance of political instability, corruption, tribalism, unemployment growth, a high population growth, and the growth of the AIDS epidemic.

Uganda's colonial experience differs. The system of indirect rule largely resulted in the absence of European settlers, and Independence came in 1962 without a struggle and prior to the formation of a Uganda nationalist movement. Events of 1964, however, signalled the end of peace and the beginning of resistance to Apollo Milton Obote's government. His defence of Buyaga and Bugangazzi counties' withdrawal from Buganda, and support of their return to Bunyoro soured the tenuous political relationship held with the Kabaka of Buganda. Consequently, anxious about dwindling support from the Buganda region, and following a small-scale domestic disturbance at Nakulabye, near Kampala, Obote's security forces over-reacted, thinking it was an anti-government riot. Two schoolchildren and four adults were

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<sup>36</sup> R. Mugo Gatheru, *Kenya: From Colonization to Independence, 1888-1970* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2005), pp. 138-147.



shot dead, including three at point-blank range inside their homes. This was the first occasion since independence that the shooting and killing of civilians had occurred.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Obote's despotism resulted in the storming of the Kabaka's palace at the 'Battle of Mengo' in 1966. The Kabaka went into exile in Britain and a state of emergency was declared in Buganda. In 1967, Obote abolished all the kingdoms in Uganda, retroactively abolishing the Kingdom of Buganda from the date of the storming of the palace. These events set in motion a tyrannical unconstitutional regime, which culminated in Idi Amin's overthrow of Obote in 1971.

Initially Amin received support from the western powers, and a majority of Ugandans, specifically as a liberator but also because of his expulsion of Asians and other foreigners.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, under his regime, the instability, terror and killings first in evidence on a large scale in Buganda in 1966, were perpetuated across Uganda, and his expulsion of the Asians in 1972 threw the Ugandan economy into crisis.

In 1979, Ugandan liberators joined forces with Tanzanian troops, and toppled Amin who went into exile. Throughout Obote's second term of office (December 1980 – July 1985), he was brutal, and ethnic massacres and the economy went out of control. The turning point for Uganda came in 1986 when Yoweri Museveni's NRA (National Resistance Army) fought a people's war and threw out the brutal regimes. Restoring the rule of law, economic growth was activated and improvements in education, health and transport.

What is noticeable about the most prominent dates in these histories is that the disturbance and consequent instability that is triggered, subsequently affects the writers, as will be shown.

## **Methodology**

The methodology of this thesis focuses equally upon theory and analysis. The interweaving and application of disparate literary theories is necessary in order to offer an in-depth analysis and a multiplicity of readings that move away from the over simplification of a single gendered or racial reading of these 'African' women's narratives. Consequently, my research is illuminated by African centred and

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<sup>37</sup> 'The 1966 Crisis', *The Uganda Crisis, 1966*, < <http://www.buganda.com/crisis66.htm> > [accessed 1 October 2009] (para. 2 of 9)

<sup>38</sup> Ian Leggett, *Uganda* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2001), p. 21.



Eurocentric theories, particularly postcolonialism, African feminisms, including nego-feminism<sup>39</sup>, and African-American Signifyin(g)<sup>40</sup>, thereby producing a link between indigenous black African writers and 'African' writers of European origin.

My approach is interdisciplinary. I therefore conduct interviews and engage in conversations with Kimenye, and communicate by letter with Macgoye in an effort to recreate the writers' 'her-stories' from their stories. During a fieldtrip to Uganda, I carried out interviews with 'ordinary' African women as well as with Uganda female writer, poet and academic, Susan Kiguli. Their response provides a source of feminist and negofeminist thought on the writers' philosophical outlook, works and literary influences. Further interviews with other male contemporaries, comprising Abasi Kiyimba, Aaron Mushengyezi and Austin Bukenya offer an alternative perspective. Additionally, I research history, historical documents, and other primary sources. My excursion into the history of East African women writers in general from 1939-2005 has enabled me to establish that current scholarship largely neglects the subjects of this study. I therefore assume the role of historiographer, reconstructing the writers' her-stories from interviews with them, and from archival documents. This equips me with a base for examining their position in contemporary writing in English from formerly colonised countries.

The main challenges are firstly: a) To combine the above and apply it to textual analysis; and b) As a white European woman working in the area of 'African' women's narratives, I must attempt to achieve an understanding of critical expectations of both literary cultures. I do this through engaging with: the writers' texts, the 'African' women writers and theorists, and the postcolonial theorists. Furthermore, an aspect of the thesis' originality emanates from my linking together of disparate theories to provide an original framework for reading and interpreting 'African' women's narratives. This enables me to draw on African knowledges and traditions and to challenge Eurocentric norms of analysis. I aim to achieve a multiple intertextual analysis of a range of East 'African' women writers and their fictions.

My bibliography is selective, including African/European, African/American, and postcolonial authors whose discourses situate them in Africanist, feminist,

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<sup>39</sup> See footnote 7.

<sup>40</sup> See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). It should be noted that Gates uses "Signifyin(g)" with an upper case 'S' and parenthesized 'g' to differentiate the use of his term from "signifying". I will likewise adopt these spellings when appropriate throughout this study.



postcolonialist or nego-feminist positions, and the criteria for author selection is primarily perspective, although race and gender is a consideration.

### **Originality and Significance of Research**

Africa has the potential to be regarded as both a frontier and a fiction frontier, with indigenous and white 'African' postcolonial women writers' new identities and new notions of civilisation meeting in the Third Space of cultural difference. Hence, the subjects of this investigation are bound together by their conscious/unconscious voyages into the European diasporic spaces in Africa as illustrated by their texts. Indigenous and white postcolonial women's narratives by writers emerging from an African/European cultural experience are combined to highlight European influence as an apparent phenomenon common to both categories of writer, with consequences for the representation of gender, identity, culture and the 'Other'. No study currently exists relating to this specific area and therefore this study moves beyond current scholarship. Its difference lies in the unique combination of writers and the comparative texts under examination, in conjunction with the various postcolonial backgrounds. Whilst no comparative study of this nature has been undertaken, a study of indigenous and white postcolonial women's writing in English for African children written from an African perspective, in particular, advances current scholarship. There is no published study of Macgoye's writing for African children, and similarly with Kimenye, who is the earliest and most renowned children's writer in English in East Africa. Kimenye has allowed me to interview her on a number of occasions, providing me with a unique insight into what informs her writing and philosophical outlook, thereby enabling my research to break new ground. Furthermore, through the analysis of various African language terms that name women and space, I endeavour to demonstrate that the notion of woman is inextricably linked with boundary crossings. Hence, I offer evidence to highlight that traditional African cultural philosophies illustrate the proposal that travel and transgression are implicit within the meaning of the Luganda, Acholi, Dholuo and Gikuyu terms for 'woman', thereby suggesting that the writers' presentations of female characters can be directly associated with the literal meanings of the variety of terms for 'woman'.

## Chapter Structure

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is the main theoretical chapter emphasising the central concerns of the thesis. Hence, it begins by debating the concept of Africanity in an attempt to define whom we regard as an African writer and in what ways. It raises the key point that identities are never simple. Hence, it can be debated that to suggest the possibility of a single African identity would be to fall back into, and draw on, Eurocentric modes of thinking that fail to acknowledge evident differences amongst African peoples, and regard Africa as a continent that is homogenous throughout. Similarly, I do not aim to search for a single truth or meaning within the select texts. Rather, taking account of the diversity of African women's experiences and identities I interweave aspects of a variety of theoretical positions to produce multiple readings of the texts. To this end, I therefore construct a theoretical framework that enables critical analysis of indigenous and (white) postcolonial 'African' women's writing, providing an exposition of the theory underpinning the analysis in subsequent chapters.

Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose's (1994) feminist questioning of the mapping of space and difference provides the foundation for my engagement with the literary theorizing of African feminism.<sup>41</sup> I therefore explore how Carole Boyce Davies (1994), Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) and Elleke Boehmer (2005) demonstrate and theorize space and differences pertinent to African women/feminism.<sup>42</sup> This in turn enables acknowledgement of African women's boundary crossings in subsequent chapters in the texts of the selected 'African' women writers.

In *The Signifying Monkey* (1988), Henry Louis Gates Jr. theorizes African folktales and the African-American oral tradition of Signifyin(g) thereby highlighting the existence of an African approach to writing and performance that signifies in a different way to the Western/European literary tradition. The concept is inseparably linked with black vernacular rhetorical strategies and embodies different meanings to the term signify. I argue that the process of Signifyin(g) is inextricably linked to

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<sup>41</sup> Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, eds., *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York: Guilford, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994; repr. 2002), Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994), and Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).



black African women's writing and that the process enables Kimenye's and Macgoye's children's writing to transgress various boundaries in order to signify to both African women, and children.

The postcolonial aspects that inform my theoretical framework are drawn from the theorizing of Edward Said (1978), Homi K. Bhabha ((1994) and Robert J.C. Young (1995).<sup>43</sup> Delineating Said's methodological device of 'strategic location', which relates to the dominant discourse's traditional Orientalist authorial positioning, I employ this device to demonstrate that Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot deliberately reposition themselves to adopt an alternative relationship with their texts, resulting in the transgression of boundaries.<sup>44</sup>

Bhabha appropriates and develops Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin's theory of hybridisation and relates it to identity and cultural difference. Thus, Bhabha's related concepts of in-between space and Third Space promote fresh ways of thinking about identity that can be related to the subjects of this study, and characters within their texts. Additionally, it permits me to attempt to fill the gap left by Said's disregard of non-Westerners' reception of Orientalist depictions of themselves. By contrast, Young challenges new hybrid forms of identity that generate a Third Space, instead suggesting that the imaginary new space formed is possibly not as wide as implied by Bhabha.

The final section of this chapter relates to a specific aspect of this thesis's originality: the translation and analysis of differing meanings attached to the terms 'woman' and 'space' in the African languages Luganda, Acholi (or Acoli), Dholuo and Gikuyu. I therefore explore African-centred concepts of 'woman' and the etymological/conceptual link to the transgressive behaviour of African women and space.

Chapter 2 examines the dialectics surrounding the notion of space and its relation to the transgression of boundaries of gender, identity, culture and the 'Other' as it relates to both the subjects of this thesis and their texts. The chosen writers purport to adopt an African perspective, but the space they occupy is different since Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot live(d) as indigenous members of African communities while Huxley situates herself as traveller/visitor/stranger. Bhabha argues that the

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<sup>43</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; repr. Penguin, 1995), Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, and Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995; repr. 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Said, p.20.



occupation of in-between spaces engenders the configuration of new identities.<sup>45</sup> Hence, the effect of the context of their lives upon the space the writers occupy, their subsequent transgression of boundaries, and the characters presented in select texts are analysed in this chapter. I also question and debate a variety of views in relation to the issues of who has the right to claim knowledge of the African woman, whilst slippage in the texts enables interrogation of the extent to which European influences impact upon an 'African' perspective.

In Chapter 3 I argue that the writers transgress accepted cultural boundaries since the dominant Western discourse privileges prejudiced and partial representations of non-Western culture. In this context, I concentrate upon the ways in which the writers position themselves in relation to their texts in order to ask how their chosen strategic location impacts upon the creation of textuality. My concern is with their deliberate re-positionings as 'Other', which enables them to write from a (black) 'African' woman's perspective. Hence, I argue that Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot deliberately strategically locate themselves in opposition to the dominant patriarchal discourses and Orientalist discourse. This allows them to reconstruct an image of the African woman that defies traditional portrayals of womanhood evident in indigenous African orature and African male-authored contemporary texts. Rather, they create African female characters that refuse to occupy the space that traditional African cultures construct for them. Hence, while such characters cross geographical boundaries in the literal sense, psychologically they are unwilling to go all the way home, thereby indicating their refusal to be rooted and a determination to route oneself. In delineating such autonomous female characters I propose that the writers engage in cultural politics through their adoption of a political stance in opposition to traditional East African patriarchal structures. I therefore suggest that their texts challenge patriarchal constructions of 'normative femininity' and that their creation of African female characters is indicative of their struggle against representational politics.<sup>46</sup> Also in this chapter, and within the context of the binary opposition of 'stranger' and 'indigenous', my new and original approach explores various African-centred concepts of the term 'woman' and the conceptual link to the transgressive behaviour of African women and space. I therefore offer an insight into alternative notions that challenge Western feminist

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<sup>45</sup> Bhabha, p.2.

<sup>46</sup> Davies, p.70.



perceptions of 'woman' and her place in the world and associated behaviours. This enables me to analyse the very particular type of space inhabited by African women, thereby making stronger links with the notion of their transgression of boundaries embedded in the roots of many of these African terms.

When African females begin crossing over into what the dominant African discourse constructs as male landscape, it is thought to be a bad omen to the extent that the most effective way of repression is considered to be the immediate silencing of the offender. Split into two parts, the first half of Chapter 4 delineates the position of the African woman whilst arguing that the notion of her silence is a fallacy, thus analysing factors attributing to her condition of alterity. Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot are adamant about their rejection of African feminism. However, in presenting the facts about the condition of African women, Ogundipe-Leslie highlights that indigenous feminisms existed pre-contact with Europe and that historically African women have not needed European encouragement to transgress boundaries of normative feminine behaviour constructed by patriarchal structures within some societies in Africa. Consequently, the 'Part One' of this chapter interrogates the alterity of Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot through their stated lack of identification with African feminism. 'Part Two' examines 'African' women writers' commitment as writers through the analysis of the contrasting styles of fiction of Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot.<sup>47</sup> Although African women are traditionally associated with the oral tradition and the distribution of knowledge to children through myths, legends and stories, female writers are perceived as crossing over into what has generally been regarded as a male landscape. Hence, this section enquires whether, in their role as storyteller, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot comply with patriarchal constructs of African normative femininity, and asks if they perform a strategic act that paradoxically enables the covert attainment of female power through the voicing of feminist issues in their fiction. Juxtaposing Ogundipe-Leslie's appeal for the destruction of stereotypes of African women, Davies's concept of normative femininity, and Boehmer's notion of the textual and temporal/territorial transgressive methods of writing, the focus is upon those characters that manifest behaviours which deviate from the traditionally ascribed behaviour of normative femininity, thereby

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<sup>47</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, p. 57.

attributing the condition of alterity to them.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, I offer an in-depth analysis into the transgression of boundaries and the subsequent creation of African women's identities through the representation of fictional African female characters.

The focus of Chapter 5 is on Kimenye and Macgoye's children's and young adult's narratives. It therefore opens with an analysis of the literary and publishing context in East Africa out of which their texts arise. I suggest that Kimenye and Macgoye utilise children's narratives to find a voice and identity for the woman writer while simultaneously conforming to and subverting normative femininity. Drawing on Gates's concept of Signifyin(g) I propose that Kimenye and Macgoye's children's narratives highlight the process through their intertextual references. Thus, I argue that their intertextual African Signifyin(g) upon Eurocentric texts like Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* series, and Richmal Crompton's *Just William* stories transgresses boundaries connected to the Eurocentric texts they refigure. Additionally, I propose that the repetition and refiguring of experiences familiar to African readers with a shared cultural identity allows Kimenye and Macgoye to integrate a covert polemic within their children's writing.

Chapter 6 concludes the study, indicating any restrictions and areas for possible future research.

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<sup>48</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, p. 64, Davies, p. 70 and Boehmer, p. 94.



## 1. AGENCY, VOICE AND SENSE OF SELF: Re-writing 'African' Women's Identity

### Opening

The theory and practice of contemporary African writing has given new meanings and prominence to the concept of Africanity. One of the concerns of this dissertation is to explain whether being an African writer is a question of nationality, race or colour. This chapter begins by debating the concept of Africanity; incorporating such considerations as, can a book be considered African because of its setting, or the writer's perspectives and worldview? The idea of defining whom we regard as an African writer and in what ways brings into perspective the notion of alterity in Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose's *Writing Women and Space* (1994).<sup>1</sup> This text addresses feminist questions regarding mapping space and difference and represents the catalyst for my engagement with the black feminist theorising of Carole Boyce Davies (1994), Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), and Elleke Boehmer (2005).<sup>2</sup>

Blunt and Rose's feminist questioning of the mapping of space and difference in relation to Western men and women provides the foundation for my engagement with the literary theorizing of African feminism. However, I do not draw on the element of universalism in Western feminisms, and the associated denial of differences/boundaries amongst women that prohibits the possibility of transgression. Rather, I explore how Davies, Ogundipe-Leslie and Boehmer demonstrate and theorize space and differences pertinent to African women/feminism with the aim of enabling acknowledgement of African women's boundary crossings in the texts of the selected African women writers.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. develops the theory of Signification that highlights the existence of an African approach to writing and performance that signifies in a different manner to the Western/European literary tradition. Gates's theorizing of African folk tales helps to show how writing for children signifies to both women and

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, eds., *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York: Guilford, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994; repr. 2002), Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994), and Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).



children.<sup>3</sup> By applying aspects of Signifyin(g) to Kimenye and Macgoye's writing for children, I propose to show how their writing transgresses boundaries through the process of Signifyin(g).

My aim is to construct a theoretical framework that enables critical analysis of indigenous and (white) postcolonial 'African' women's writing. In 'Postcoloniality and the Phenomenon of the European Diaspora', I delineate the aspects of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Robert J.C. Young's theorizing that inform my framework. Drawing on Said's methodological device for studying the author in addition to the Orientalist perpetuation of ideologies of separation between 'races' and cultures enables me to highlight the 'African' women writers' subversion of the dominant discourse's traditional Orientalist authorial positioning, defined by Said as 'strategic location'.<sup>4</sup> Consideration of this concept will demonstrate that these women adopt an alternative relationship with their texts, thereby highlighting their deliberate repositioning of themselves and their resulting transgression of cultural boundaries.

Bhabha draws on pre-postcolonial theorist Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin to propose his theory of hybridization of cultures. He appropriates Bakhtin's notion that different 'linguistic consciousnesses'<sup>5</sup> fuse together to result in hybridization in language, and develops it in relation to identity and 'cultural difference.'<sup>6</sup> By examining and elaborating upon Bhabha's concept of cultural difference I attempt to fill the gap left by Said's neglect of non-Westerners' reception of Orientalist depictions of themselves. Throughout this thesis, I show that Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye, and Ogot can be thought of as the embodiment of a 'cultural difference' that welcomes new and alternative identities that reside in the 'Third Space'.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, analysis and demonstration of their transgression of various boundaries will situate them as culturally different on a number of levels.

Young is also preoccupied with hybrid identities generated in the Third Space of cultural difference. However, his concern is to challenge hybridity's suggestion of the impossibility of essentialism, and thereby illustrate postcolonial theory's

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; repr. Penguin, 1995), p.20.

<sup>5</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' (1934-1935) *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981; 1992), pp. 259 – 422 (p. 358).

<sup>6</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994; repr. 2006) p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.53-56.



complicity with colonial discourse.<sup>8</sup> Whilst wholly engaging with these literary theories, the combination of writers and their works suggests an interweaving of differing theoretical approaches. Hence my own approach is grounded in Zora Neale Hurston's method of 'going a piece of the way with them';<sup>9</sup> and an engagement with Mary Louise Pratt's concept, the 'contact zone', which she defines as 'an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence [sic] of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect.'<sup>10</sup> The resultant polyphony of voices enables the contestation of a variety of positions and a multiplicity of readings. To emphasize my arguments I will be engaging with other current theorists working in the areas of postcolonial literary theory and African feminism.

Finally, this chapter highlights a specific aspect of my new and original research.

### Literary Identity and the African Writer

Echoing Kwame Anthony Appiah, it is pertinent to establish from the outset that notions surrounding identity are social and cultural constructs.<sup>11</sup> I, like Appiah, believe 'that a biologically-rooted conception of race is both dangerous in practice and misleading in theory: African unity, African identity, need securer foundations than race'.<sup>12</sup> As with notions surrounding identity, 'race' is also a social construct. Nineteenth and early twentieth century European scientific thinking, which specified supposedly distinct biological types, supported and reinforced differences between races.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the concept of 'race' leads to racial hierarchy because although it is now discredited as a meaningful biological category, contemporary

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<sup>8</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995; repr. 2002), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, 'How it Feels to Be Colored Me', *I Love Myself When I am Laughing...A Zora Neale Hurston Reader*, ed. by Alice Walker (New York: The Feminist Press, 1979), pp. 151 – 155 (p. 152), in Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994; repr. 2002), p. 38 & p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992), p. 284.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.285.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Ratchliffe, 'Race', *Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004), pp. 22.



understandings of 'race' carry the trace of early scientific thinking.<sup>15</sup> The notion of differences relating to black people in comparison with white people, for example, are informed by biological and other forms of determinism (intrinsic ability, character) whereby it is assumed that the skin you are born into determines your identity. The problematic nature of the term 'race' therefore means that it is not valued as an analytical category.<sup>16</sup> Hence, to avoid confusion I will examine the meaning and appropriateness of my initial application of the term 'African' woman writer to define and group together the writers of this study.

Ogot, an indigenous black African female writer, falls undisputedly into the nomenclature, African woman writer. Nevertheless, voicing his thoughts regarding the African novel and writer, Chinua Achebe states:

It is in fact a view of the world and of the whole cosmos perceived from a particular position. [...] As for who an African novelist is, it is partly a matter of passports, of individual volition and particularly of seeing from that perspective. [...] And it is not even a matter of colour<sup>17</sup>

Achebe is not proposing that a writer of a book with an African setting be recognised and defined as an African writer. For example, Karen Blixen's *Out of Africa* (1938), Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), are all set in Africa. Yet Blixen clings to the European literary stereotypes of the African continent. As prescribed by her textual representations, the opening scenes of the film adaptation of *Out of Africa*, based on her life as a pioneering Danish coffee farmer in Kenya, focus upon breathtaking African landscapes, magnificent flora and fauna, noble beasts, but no Africans. Similarly, Conrad's projection of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* centres upon his numerous textual representations of Africa and Africans as the binary opposites of England and the English such that the implication is clearly that Africa is the antithesis of Europe and of civilisation.<sup>18</sup> Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* is notable as the first English adventure novel with an African setting. Responsible for generating the literary category known as the Lost World genre because the narratives are about the discovery of fictional lost civilisations, *King Solomon's Mines* remains an exciting

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp.15-26.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) and Peter Ratcliffe, 'Race', *Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Chinua Achebe, 'Thoughts on the African Novel' (1973), *Hopes and Impediments* (see footnote 4, 'Introduction'), pp. 91 – 99 (pp. 92 – 93).

<sup>18</sup> Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*' (1975), *Hopes and Impediments*, pp. 1 – 13 (p. 2).



adventure story that depicts a European fantasy of Africa.<sup>19</sup> Yet, it simultaneously problematizes the very notion of Africa as a world devoid of culture and thus, any similarity with Europe by drawing inspiration from nineteenth century archaeological discoveries of lost civilisations in Africa. Hence, tales such as Haggard's give lie to the European construction of Africa as a continent antithetical to Europe and lacking any form of societal organisation. In an attempt to silence notions relating to the existence of African civilisations, *King Solomon's Mines* promotes the notion of Africa as the dark continent, and therefore the enlightened and civilised European adventurers journey into the 'heart of darkness', braving the barbarism of African kinship groups in order to paradoxically (re)discover lost civilisations. Written primarily for a European audience, such texts may be set in Africa, but they are not representative of African concerns or of an African socio-political position. By contrast, the adoption of an African perspective - illustrated by the depiction of specifically African environments and concerns, and the creation of recognisable African characters - by the 'African' female writers under analysis herein is significant, but one that is ultimately influenced and thus problematized by the writer's notion of who her implied reader is.<sup>20</sup>

Achebe's comments above would, however, seem to suggest that being indigenous and black are not necessarily prerequisites for being defined or perceived as an African writer. The crucial indicator appears to be whether the writer exhibits an African perspective and world-view. Wole Soyinka makes the related point that 'aural perception colours the visual': or that a particular accent can serve to classify and even stratify an individual.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, it is possible to employ this concept in

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<sup>19</sup> The literary genre known as the Lost World belongs to the fantasy genre. In the nineteenth century, word of imperial adventurers' archaeological discoveries of lost civilisations, for example, Egypt's Valley of the Kings captured the imagination of the public. It was during this period when the genre began to evolve. Fictional works that belong to this category are about the discovery of a lost world. *King Solomon's Mines* is responsible for spawning the Lost World genre, but other narratives that belong to this category include Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King* (1888), Edgar Rice Burroughs's *The Land That Time Forgot* (1918), Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912), and HP Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931). In films, the Lost World genre is apparent in the *Indiana Jones* movies, and in video games in the like of *Tomb Raider*.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 2, where I argue that although Huxley attempts to adopt an African perspective in *Red Strangers*, her intended audience is European and she herself is guilty of projecting her own Eurocentric opinions onto the Gikuyu group she writes and speaks for, thereby ultimately problematizing the defining of her as an 'African' writer. See also Chapter 5, where I discuss the irrelevance to African child readers of European children's fiction written for a European audience and Kimenye's determination to produce narratives that are relevant and signify to her African audience.

<sup>21</sup> Wole Soyinka, 'Language as Boundary' (1978), *Art, Dialogue and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture* (Ibadan: New Horn Press, 1988; revised & expanded edn. London: Methuen, 1993), pp. 82 - 94 (p. 84).



respect of the oral/textual perception of literary works, as demonstrated by the defining of white writer Jean Rhys, as Caribbean. While her birth would seem to suggest the defining of her as a Creole writer, the perspective she chooses to adopt and privilege leads her to be recognised and known as a Caribbean writer. In the context of this study, I would like to suggest that the oral/textual perception of the literary works under analysis here 'colour' or define the writers because their writing presents an African world-view. Furthermore, the content of the writers' texts is African, as are aspects of the form of select works.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, in order to avoid the accusation of defining the subjects of this study uncritically, it is important to analyse further the concept of Africanity.

### Africanity

Fabien Eboussi Boulaga argues that blackness and Africanity do not necessarily go hand in hand and that 'one can be black without being African and African without being black'.<sup>23</sup> Appearing to share a similar philosophy to Achebe,<sup>24</sup> Boulaga's comments would seem to indicate that Africanity, or being African, is not necessarily primarily concerned with the question of African nationality but about adopting a particular perspective and social/political position. However, by way of contrast, Ali A. Mazrui argues that blackness is a significant factor in the concept of Africanity,<sup>25</sup> and similarly, for Achille Mbembe, non-black Africanity 'is simply unthinkable'.<sup>26</sup> Whilst taking account of this viewpoint, we should also be clear that identities are never simple. It is arguable that there is no single African identity, and to suggest there is would be to fall back into Eurocentrism, which recognises no apparent differences between African people, and perceives Africa – a continent with many different eco-systems - as homogenous with the same nature throughout. Rather, African identities 'are complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political and cultural forces, almost always in

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 5 of this thesis, 'Creative Dialogues, Signification, Gender, and Space: Talking through Contemporary Children's Stories'.

<sup>23</sup> Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, 'Race, Identity, and Africanity' *CODESRIA Bulletin* 1 (2000), pp. 61 – 65 (p.62 & p. 63).

<sup>24</sup> See Achebe's statement on page 22.

<sup>25</sup> Ali A. Mazrui, *Africanity Redefined: Collected Essays Of Ali A. Mazrui, Vol. 1*, ed. by Ricardo Rene Laremont & Tracia Leacock Seghatolislami (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2002), p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Achille Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing' *Public Culture* 14:1 (2000) pp. 239 – 273 (p. 256).



opposition to other identities'.<sup>27</sup> If an African identity grows out of opposition to a European colonial and postcolonial identity, for example, then skin colour can be perceived of as crucial, particularly as it acts as a visual indicator of identity. This view leads us back to 'race', however, which Appiah reminds us (as highlighted earlier in the chapter) is not a secure foundation upon which to build an African identity.

Bearing in mind the above arguments it is possible to recognise the difficulties of collectively defining the subjects of this study as 'African' writers, albeit in inverted commas. Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot, irrespective of colour or nationality, all purport to identify with and write from an African perspective. Does this then mean that the correct way to refer to them is as African centric writers? One valid interpretation of African centrism is that it offers a way of 'decolonising knowledge in Africa' in addition to being 'an antidote to Eurocentrism through which all knowledge about Africa has been filtered'.<sup>28</sup> Such an understanding of the notion of African centrism indicates a releasing of the mind from Eurocentric notions, denoting an adoption, or a return, to the privileging of an African reality or perspective. Defining Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot by this terminology would appear to be reasonable when taking account of the African-centred perspective they attempt to project. Unfortunately, labelling these writers in this manner is not without problems. Carole Boyce Davies regards ways of thinking that emanate from a single centre, such as Eurocentrism, as unicentric and therefore ultimately oppressive because they limit diversity.<sup>29</sup> As highlighted in the 'Introduction', Ogot's indigenous identity is multiple since it is informed by a missionary education, Christian Bible stories and traditional Luo myths, among other things. Similarly, Huxley, Kimenye and Macgoye all emanate from Western culture but conceive of themselves as indigenous of the African cultures that they have lived amongst and consequently adopted. The argument therefore exists that in defining these women as African centric writers their diverse and multiple identities have a tendency to be suppressed. Hence I am adhering to my original decision to categorise this particular group of writers as 'African' women writers, and the inverted commas

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<sup>27</sup> Appiah, p.289.

<sup>28</sup> Archie Mafeje, 'Africinity: A Combative Ontology' *CODESRIA Bulletin 1*, (2000) pp. 66 – 71, (p. 66).

<sup>29</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, 'Beyond Unicentricity: Transcultural Black Presences (Multiculturalism)' *Research in African Literatures* 30:2 (Summer 1999): 96 (1). *Expanded Academic ASAP*. Thompson Gale. University of Derby. 25 May 2007.

remain to act as a reminder of the above debate relating to the suitability and correctness of its use.

My main concern is that literature from Africa forms one aspect of the contemporary writing in English from formerly colonised countries, yet the achievements of indigenous writer Ogot, are overshadowed by the critical acclaim received by her male counterparts Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Okot p' Bitek and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for example. Meanwhile, Kimenye, and white writers Huxley and Macgoye, who all adopt an African perspective, do not fit into the 'expatriate literature' genre. Having lived in Kenya, British-born writers Huxley and Macgoye identify with indigenous peoples and cultures, as their texts demonstrate. Macgoye's African perspective is also backed up and reinforced by the concern she shows in her letters that the anthropological and sociological aspects of women's positions in Africa, along with an awareness of what empowers African women, form a part of this study.<sup>30</sup> Born in Britain of mixed parentage, and married to a Tanzanian, Kimenye moved to Uganda in the early fifties. She reveals that she considers herself Ugandan by birth and most importantly, is only inspired to write when living in East Africa. She admits to adopting an African perspective in *Kalasanda* (1965) and *Kalasanda Revisited* (1966) to give an alternative to the common sixties portrayal of African village life as 'a sort of dull, solid, backwash affair'.<sup>31</sup> She confesses that she intentionally writes her children's stories from an African perspective because she has an acute awareness of the irrelevancy to African children of stories written from a European perspective.<sup>32</sup>

### Constructing a Theoretical Framework

Acknowledgement of the possibility of the application of alternative interpretations that exist outside of the context of the text and which open the mind to the multiple meanings contained therein, highlights the confining nature of searching for a single truth. Davies, in *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, suggests that the mutability and diversity that distinguish black African women's experiences and identities prescribe the formulation of a theory that moves away from an exclusionary

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<sup>30</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye to Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 20 May 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye, 6 July 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



totalizing system towards the multiplicity offered by the juxtaposition of a variety of positions that she refers to as a 'critical relationality'.<sup>32</sup> She states:

Critical relationality moves beyond a singular, monochromatic approach to any work to a complexly-integrated and relational theoretics; it allows the situation of a text in its own context, but provides an ability to understand and relate it to a range of other dimensions of thought.<sup>33</sup>

Here, Davies's use of critical relationality echoes Jean-François Lyotard's 'heterogeneity of elements'.<sup>34</sup> Like Lyotard, Davies advocates a shift away from totalitarianism and single unifying principles that produce universalising master narratives and oppression. Embracing the application of inclusive polyphonic theoretical positions interacting together, theorists such as Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, Mae G. Henderson, and Barbara Smith are also arguing, with Davies, for multiple readings of texts. Hence, a single approach to 'African' women's texts represents a totalising reading system. This notion gains support from Henderson when she comments on how 'the "critical insights" of one reading might well become the "blind spots" of another reading.'<sup>35</sup> Therefore, if you singularly use either a 'gendered', or 'racial'<sup>36</sup> reading of 'African' women's writing it becomes an over simplification, or what Jameson refers to as "'strategies of containment'",<sup>37</sup> which limit meaning, and prohibit 'African' women writers' "'simultaneity of discourses.'"<sup>38</sup> Henderson argues that application of a single gendered or race-related approach to the interpretation of black women's literary texts ascribes the diminished and devalued category of 'Otherness'.<sup>39</sup> Critical relationality represents a shift away from such totalitarianism,

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<sup>32</sup> Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, p.56.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>34</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979; repr. 1984), p. xxiv.

<sup>35</sup> Mae G. Henderson, 'Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition' (1989), in *S & F Online* <[www.barbard.edu/sfonline](http://www.barbard.edu/sfonline)> [accessed 4 July 2006] 1-21 (section 1 of 4, p.2) Double Issue: 3.3 & 4.1, *The Scholar & Feminist XXX: Past Controversies, Present Challenges, Future Feminism* Document Archive, repr. from: *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000). Also in *Changing Our Own Words*, ed. by Cheryl Wall (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989). Repr. in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: NAL, 1990); repr. in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. by Joan Scott & Judith Butler (New York: Routledge, 1992); repr. in *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, ed. by Hilde Hein & Carolyn Korsmeyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); repr. in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>38</sup> Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table; Women of Color Press, 1983), p. xxxii, in Mae G. Henderson, 'Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition' (section 1 of 4, p.2)

<sup>39</sup> Henderson, p.2.



enabling negotiation with eclectic theories, and the selection and application of what is relevant to the dialectics of African womanhood in the transgression of boundaries in postcolonial women's narratives in Africa. For Davies, Lyotard, and Henderson, such a plurality of voices provides liberation from foundational modes of thinking that represent an imprisonment of thought. Critical relationality thereby allows the recovery and accordance of value to the previously marginalized and silenced voices of 'African' women writers like Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot who challenge dominant Western textual attitudes through their re-presentation of non-Western characters and culture.

### Boundary Crossings of Space and Difference

In *Writing Women and Space*, Blunt and Rose perceive spatial imagery and its subsequent relation to the appropriation of masculinist power and feminist resistance to be of extreme importance in feminist theorizing. They state that 'the social construction of gender difference establishes some spaces as women's and others as men's; those meanings then serve to reconstitute the power relations of gendered identity'.<sup>40</sup> Blunt and Rose's concern is that Western feminism is preoccupied with making the distinction between masculine public space (culture, politics, economy), and feminine private domestic space. Such spaces are indicative of the construction of patriarchal society and authority: patriarchal control of public space ultimately rules and has power over female domestic space, which subsequently devalues women and defines them as 'Other' in relation to the male. However, they warn:

The geography of the public/private division should be seen as mostly relevant to white, middle-class feminism. Attempts to universalize its neat distinction between two spaces and two genders erase its implicit race and class specificities.<sup>41</sup>

Hence, in the process of researching other feminisms by writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), I have established that white Western first world feminisms differ from Anzaldúa's and Minh-ha's feminist theorising because first world feminisms foreground a universalising scale by which women are defined. Writers with multiple identities, like lesbian Mexican/American Anzaldúa and Vietnamese feminist writer, postcolonial theorist, composer and filmmaker Minh-

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<sup>40</sup> Blunt & Rose p.3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.4.



ha challenge a universalising approach because they cannot be easily defined or labelled. Rather, they revel in the multiplicity of their individual identities, to the extent that Anzaldúa states:

Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man's world, the women's, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web.<sup>43</sup>

Anzaldúa uses the notion of the Hindu divinity, Shiva, to aid the understanding of her complex individual identity. One is therefore many, to the extent that she does not have one identity but numerous and all dependent upon perspective. Thus, to attempt to define is to confine because inherent within the notion of universalism is the sense of unification. Consequently, such complex identities as Anzaldúa and Minh-ha's speak of multiplicity of self, voice and identity. Hence, Sara Ahmed (2000) confirms that Western feminists' universalising thought proceeds by assuming knowledge of 'third world women'.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, an image of what is believed to constitute the average third world/black African woman is produced, resulting in theoretical interpretations of 'sexually constrained [...] ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized etc.' women who are constructed as 'Other' to Western women.<sup>45</sup> The effect of this is to make 'third world women' strangers to feminism. Although Blunt and Rose question the mapping of space and difference in relation to men and women, white Western universalist feminism ignores sexuality, race and class based oppression of women. Furthermore, the element of universalism, and the associated denial of difference/boundaries amongst women, in Western feminisms highlighted by Blunt and Rose,<sup>46</sup> fails to acknowledge any possibility of deviancy and therefore closes off readings of 'African' women's texts. In the belief that women worldwide suffer, and are subject to the same forms of oppression, the universalism associated with white Western feminisms denies difference and obliterates boundaries between women and groups of women, so

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<sup>43</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, 'La Prieta', *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, ed. by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), pp. 198 – 209 (p. 205).

<sup>44</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 165.

<sup>45</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty in Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 165.

<sup>46</sup> Blunt & Rose, p.4.



refusing them the possibility of boundary crossings. Macgoye voices a similar concern:

Feminism is a forty-year aberration [...] many do not recognise that childless women have always gone out to work and that highly educated religious women (Heloise, Hrotswitha, Abbess Hilda, to take examples from a safe distance) were the Condoleezza Rices of their time.<sup>47</sup>

While commenting on the failing of universalist white Western feminisms to take account of differences amongst white European women, Macgoye testifies to the boundary crossings of white European women dating as far back as Abbess Hilda in the seventh century. The term 'alterity' provides a way of defining such differences.<sup>48</sup>

Alterity is a differentness, or lack of identification with a part of one's community in some form. In *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890 – 1920* (2002), Boehmer uses alterity in relation to the elite colonised 'Other', who, by adopting positions of self-articulated cultural nationalism, inhabit a position of differentness.<sup>49</sup>

Showing her concern for the alternative position of alterity occupied by Kenyan/African women, Macgoye comments:

You people from the West [...] come from a society where almost everyone over forty was brought up in early years by a full-time mother or regarded as deprived, needing compensation, if that was not so. Here you can see the result of three generations of maternity leave babies whose mothers are not even aware how they are failing. A teacher here gets two months maternity leave, one before and one after giving birth. [...] You can take a child to hospital and have it "cared for" by a student nurse who has left a six month baby two hundred miles away while she goes into training. A member of my own extended family [...] came to a vacation course five days after giving birth, bringing an older child to sit with the baby, rather than postpone the upgrading course.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, Kimenye observes:

I was busy bringing up two children on my own. I was working full-time as a journalist and I was writing books. [...] I know Gikuyu women, and I know Baganda ladies and I know Masai ladies, and I just think African women are very, very strong characters generally. I've never met a downtrodden one yet. [...] and they're good business women too.<sup>51</sup>

Macgoye and Kimenye thus delineate the position of alterity occupied by Kenyan/African women in comparison with Western women, whilst hinting at the

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<sup>47</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye to Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 1 August 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. By Michael B. Smith (London: Athlone, 1999) in Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890 – 1920: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 176 – 177.

<sup>49</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890 – 1920: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.176.

<sup>50</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye to Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 1 August 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.



suggestion that European writers/critics and African men create misconceptions about African women.

The shortcoming of Western feminisms influences me to explore black feminist and womanist theorising, which offers an open route to the understanding of 'African' women's writing. Davies, Boehmer and Ogundipe-Leslie are concerned to examine the position of alterity in relation to African women. Hence, Davies develops Blunt's and Rose's discussion of the Western gendering of spatial imagery by intersecting African culture with gender to formulate her own theory of black African feminism. Her concept of 'normative femininity' relates to black African womanhood and its normative construction within African society.<sup>51</sup> Thus, my application of this concept to characters in the primary texts will enable recognition of behaviours that deviate from normative femininity, thereby simultaneously assigning the condition of alterity and expressing the transgression of boundaries.

### Normative Femininity and the Construction of Gender Identity

Davies's concept of normative femininity explores the construction of black African subjectivity and the re-negotiation of identity. I employ this concept to examine the construction of identity in Kimenye's and Macgoye's children's writing, and to illustrate how the writers present characters like Victoria in Macgoye's *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*,<sup>52</sup> or Pamela in Kimenye's *The Runaway Bride*,<sup>53</sup> who occupy transgressive female positions. Such characters simultaneously re-negotiate identity and contest black African normative femininity. My aim is to demonstrate that normative femininity has implications for writers and characters, and to show how both transgress the associated boundaries.

Davies identifies a set of criteria to define normative femininity, or 'normal' black African female behaviour, which she derives from her reading of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* (1970). In this play, Anowa's mother expresses the generally accepted definition of an African woman.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Davies suggests that the social construction of the normative African woman positions her specifically in the home, if we take into account marriage, domesticity, bearing offspring, community

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<sup>51</sup> Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, p.70.

<sup>52</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* (London: Macmillan, 1993)

<sup>53</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride* (London: Macmillan, 1994)

<sup>54</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo, *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa* (Essex: Longman, 1998), pp. 59 – 124 (p.72).

participation, succession of the mother's societal position after her death, the rewards (possibly material) of seniority, and superiority in the protection of the community.<sup>56</sup> The dominant discourse constructs the home as a location of peace and calm, comfort and security, but it is simultaneously the site of compulsory domesticity, and, imposer of gendered (feminine) relations and/or activity - like looking after the home or *shamba*, and childbearing - as dictated by the construction of African normative femininity.<sup>57</sup>

### Woman as Storyteller

A particular aspect of gendered activity related to normative femininity includes the informal education of children through the traditional woman's role of orator or storyteller. I will illustrate that the role of storyteller offers African women the opportunity to transgress boundaries whilst appearing to comply with behaviours associated with normative femininity. However, in relation to African women's writing, the importance of African female publishers should not be overlooked, since, although Macgoye considers that "finding a voice" is not our problem', African women writers' associated transgression of boundaries would remain unacknowledged without effective dissemination.<sup>58</sup> Hence, in Kenya, it is the concern, for example, of Janet Njoroge, Managing Director of Longhorn; Sara Mwangi, founder and director of Focus Books; and prolific author, Asanath Bole Odaga, who runs Lake Publishing and Bookshop in Kisumu, to produce and distribute African women's voices to the public. In Uganda, FEMRITE publications of Kampala is an indigenous, non-profit-making voluntary association of Ugandan women writers whose aim is 'uniting, promoting and inspiring all creative women writers and assisting in the production of their works.'<sup>59</sup> Similarly, 'The Women Writing Africa Project', a project of The Feminist Press suggested by Tuzyline Jita Allan and Florence Howe, came into being to highlight African women's oral and written creativity and to embody 'the experience of African women in envisioning

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<sup>56</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo, *The Dilemma of a Ghost and Anowa* (Essex: Longman, 1998), pp. 59 – 124 (p. 72), in Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, pp. 69 – 70.

<sup>57</sup> *Shamba* is the Luganda word for farm.

<sup>58</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye to Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 1 August 2006.

<sup>59</sup> Mary Karoro Okurut, 'Preface', *A Woman's Voice: An Anthology of Short Stories by Ugandan Women*, ed. by Mary Karoro Okurut and Violet Barungi (Kampala: FEMRITE Publications, 1998).



their lives in relation to their societies.’<sup>60</sup> Thus, although the role of orator is a traditional space, these organisations are important to African women’s writing and publication because they promote the circulation and reading of narratives about women’s battle to survive environments created by patriarchal impositions.

Although the woman as storyteller represents a space that gives women a legitimate voice, Davies argues that marriage renders the woman a voiceless possession, only able to achieve rights through her children, and seniority, as she ages.<sup>61</sup> This argument is borne out by Macgoye:

[...] child-bearing women [...] are the source of wealth and fertility in societies barely able to maintain their populations and therefore need to be jealously guarded within the clan, and post-menopausal women, who, being no longer sexually active are like a man [...] and allowed to express an opinion, perhaps formally in the council, more often by advising her menfolk, who highly esteem her stored wisdom.<sup>62</sup>

Macgoye also states that ‘traditionally all women were married. [...] Childless women were disadvantaged, having no one to support them in a dispute’.<sup>63</sup> The difference between marriage and childbearing, however, is that the woman’s deference to marriage does not determine her value within the clan. Rather, the measure of African normative female identity is through childbearing and the perpetuation of the clan or line. Thus, a woman may be married and subservient to her husband, respectful of tradition, but still ultimately without value to the clan until childbearing occurs. It is therefore the wife and mother, rather than merely the wife who complies with the image of normative femininity as constructed by patriarchal structures within some societies in Africa. Clearly, African women who reject their traditionally constructed role and refuse to serve the male by conforming to the custom of marriage and childbearing risk alienation by the community, since their behaviour is not considered normative.

My examination of the writers’ texts will reveal their concentration upon women’s society and community. Boehmer refers to this aspect of African women’s

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<sup>60</sup> Tuzyline Jita Allan, Abena P.A. Busia, and Florence Howe, ‘A Note on the Women Writing Africa Project’, *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, ed. by Amandina Lihamba, Fulata L. Moyo, M.M.Mulokozi, Naomi L. Shiteni, and Saïda Yahya-Othman (New York: The Feminist Press, 2007), pp. xv - xviii (p.xv).

<sup>61</sup> Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, ‘Not Spinning on the Axis of Maleness’, *Sisterhood is Global*, ed. by Robin Morgan (New York: Anchor Press, 1985), pp. 498 – 504 (p. 501), in Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, p. 68.

<sup>62</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye to Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 20 May 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, 1 August 2006.



writing as temporal/territorial alteration of the subjects of the text.<sup>64</sup> The writers' concentration upon women's society and community provides an opportunity for the representation of African women characters that transgress the boundaries of normative femininity.

Economic, political and ideological practices constitute patriarchal societies, which privilege the male, thereby, producing woman's social subjectivity and signification as 'Other'. Patriarchal power, privilege, and ability to exploit women are reliant upon women's willingness to conform to the social construction of normative femininity. The hierarchical positioning of the African male in society is, therefore, very much dependent upon women's acceptance and compliance with normative femininity, its associated subordination, and subsequent privileging of the male. Like Said's model of Orientalism, which uses the Orient to define the Occident, the African male uses African women to define his position.

Davies reasons that compliance with 'the standard of what is a man',<sup>65</sup> or, the African male's normative masculine subjectivity is very much dependent upon his subordination of wife/women in line with patriarchy's construction of normative femininity. In accepting her position of oppression or 'Other' - as defined by normative femininity - as natural, she also apparently supports the system. An African woman who marries and conforms to her role of normative femininity accepts her position of 'Other' and in so doing promotes male power. Alternatively, and in comparison with Frantz Fanon's theorization of the native's strategic operation to gain power over the colonizer, her passivity may also be interpreted as a deliberate survival strategy.<sup>66</sup> Knowing that her position of inferiority is a construction, the African woman plays the game, thus maintaining the status quo, but able to prepare for combat.<sup>67</sup> However, African women who transgress boundaries by openly refusing to conform to the construction of African normative femininity reject patriarchal oppression and disrupt the fundamentals of patriarchal control over women. Furthermore, it will be seen that through the normative act of storytelling the female storyteller can challenge and disrupt the construct of normative femininity. Thus, I analyse transgressions of boundaries by characters in the 'African' women

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<sup>64</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.94.

<sup>65</sup> Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, p.66.

<sup>66</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1965), p. 39.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.



writers' texts to determine the impact upon matters concerning gender, identity, culture, and the 'Other'.

### Spatial Imagery and Colonized Landscapes

Blunt and Rose's concern with spatial imagery and colonized landscapes is evident in the following quote. They state:

The feminization of colonized landscapes can illustrate the positionality inherent in viewing/reading landscapes [...]. The association of indigenous women with colonized land legitimated perceptions of both women and land as objects of colonization. Imperialist literature often incorporated sexual imagery to create and sustain the heroic stature of male colonizers [...].<sup>67</sup>

Here they stress that the relationship between indigenous women and landscapes emerged during the colonial period as a way of exerting colonial power and political domination over women and geographical space. Notwithstanding, Boehmer fills the gap left by their disregard of the continued existence of the gendered formation of nations post-independence, and its impact upon the female 'Other'. Her theorizing is concerned with the African woman writer's approach to the imagery of the motherland/Mother Africa figure, and how, in response, she writes the erased/marginalized role of the woman/daughter through the introduction of 'women's vocality' and the representation of African women's lives.<sup>68</sup> This thesis therefore shows how African feminisms avoid and contradict the universalism associated with European feminisms, and its denial of differences/alterity between women and any related boundary crossings.

In *Stories of Women*, Boehmer defines African literature of the recent past as 'a nationalist and masculinist preserve'.<sup>69</sup> In so doing, she is relating to Aidoo, who draws attention to the:

widely-held opinion that [African] literature is better served only through the portrayal of heroic (or even non-heroic) males as they grapple with the problems and challenges of existence. This of course means that if women writers want their works to be considered as 'literature', then their characters, or at least the main ones should be men. All this works out to a fairly simple formula: men writers should write about men, and women writers should write about men.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Blunt & Rose, p.10.

<sup>68</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.94.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.93.

<sup>70</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo, 'To Be an African Woman Writer – an Overview and a Detail', *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference Stockholm 1986*, ed. by Kirsten Holst Petersen (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988), pp. 155 – 172 (p. 168).

Similarly, Florence Stratton remarks on the entrenchment of a specific image of 'normative femininity' within African male literature, 'The Mother Africa Trope.'<sup>72</sup> Helen Nabasuta Mugambi further illustrates the extent of the trope's existence when commenting on the mother/creator image in Ugandan folktales.<sup>73</sup> Stratton asserts that 'the trope operates against the interests of women, excluding them, implicitly if not explicitly, from authorship and citizenship';<sup>74</sup> a view echoed by Ogundipe-Leslie.<sup>75</sup> Boehmer likewise observes that women's presence within the nation is ignored in this type of masculinist writing,<sup>76</sup> and subsequently concludes, in agreement with Stratton,<sup>77</sup> that:

Simply by writing, women directly confront and face down the male prerogative. In writing, [...] women express their own reality, unsettle male-focused (and other exclusionary) narratives, and so question received notions of national character and experience. But writing is more than this, too. To write is not only to speak for one's place in the world. It is also to *make* one's own place and narrative, to tell the story of oneself, to create an identity.<sup>78</sup>

I show that through their transgression of the boundaries of 'traditional male-centred narrative'<sup>79</sup> and normative femininity, Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye, and Ogot '*make* one's own place and narrative [...] to create an identity',<sup>80</sup> thereby making room for women within African literature.<sup>81</sup> Boehmer identifies two transgressive methods adopted by African women writers, 'the *textual* and the (broadly)

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<sup>72</sup> Florence Stratton, 'The Mother Africa Trope', *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 39 - 55 (p. 39).

<sup>73</sup> Helen Nabasuta Mugambi, 'Intersections: Gender, Orality, Text, and Female Space in Contemporary Kiganda Radio Songs. (Women as Oral Artists).', *Research in African Literatures*, 25:3 (1994), pp. 47 - 71, in *Expanded Academic ASAP* (Thomson Gale: University of Derby, 17 Oct., 2006) <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC->

[Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=EAIM&docId=A15778851&source=gale&srcprod=EAIM&userGroupName=derby&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=EAIM&docId=A15778851&source=gale&srcprod=EAIM&userGroupName=derby&version=1.0) [accessed 17 October 2006], pp. 1 - 21 (p. 8).

<sup>74</sup> Stratton, p.40.

<sup>75</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-creating Ourselves*, p.58.

<sup>76</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.93.

<sup>77</sup> Stratton, p. 54. Stratton asserts that 'by repudiating the trope, women writers reject the national vision the trope engenders.'

<sup>78</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.94.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.95

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.94.

<sup>81</sup> Mariama Ba interviewed by Mineke Schipper, 'Mother Africa on a Pedestal: The Male Heritage in African Literature and Criticism', *African Literature Today*, 15 (1987), 35 - 54, (46 - 47). She argues that the African woman writer must 'present the position of women in Africa in all its aspects. [...] As women, we must work for our own future, we must overthrow the status quo which harms us and we must no longer submit to it. Like men, we must use literature as a non-violent but effective weapon. We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African Mother who, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa. Within African literature, room must be made for women'. Also in Stratton, (1994) pp. 54 - 55.



*temporal/territorial*’,<sup>82</sup> that challenge the masculinist gendered text and images of ‘normative femininity’, or gendered definitions of social reality.

Boehmer applies textual interruption and temporal/territorial alteration to her reading of Flora Nwapa because she is preoccupied with women’s everyday lives, particularly within the community. Boehmer asserts that it is Nwapa’s refusal to represent ‘manly adventures and public displays of patriarchal authority’ that locates her writing ‘outside traditional, male-centred narrative history’.<sup>83</sup> Nwapa’s focus on female gendered activities relating to domesticity, motherhood, and female personal matters exemplify Boehmer’s concept of temporal/territorial alteration by illustrating and giving value to the extent of women’s activities. Likewise, she represents ‘women’s verbal presence’ through the employment of conversations between women, and by her application of ‘choric language’: an acknowledgement and representation of women’s chatter.<sup>84</sup>

In relation to traditional masculinist narratives, African women writers’ representation of ‘women’s verbal presence’ is in itself a contravention of expectations, but it also demonstrates that African male writers only represent a part of African life.<sup>85</sup> To Boehmer, African women writers’ concentration upon, and representation of women’s society and conversation is suggestive to her of an autonomy that makes women’s marginalization appear only seemingly marginal.<sup>86</sup> This view of women’s seemingly marginal status forms a link with Fanon’s notion of the native’s strategic actions, and reinforces Davies’s and Teresa L. Ebert’s argument that women’s compliance with patriarchy actually locates the female in a position of power.<sup>87</sup> My analysis of Kimenye’s and Macgoye’s appropriation and subversion of the traditional woman’s role of storyteller will illustrate this argument.

When Boehmer states that African literature is ‘a nationalist and masculinist preserve,’ the implication is that it can be subsequently understood as interpellating African women into normative feminine behaviours through the male stereotyping of African women.<sup>88</sup> What is notable about the writers of this study, however, is that as

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<sup>82</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.94.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.97.

<sup>87</sup> Teresa L. Ebert, ‘Political Semiosis in/of American Cultural Studies’, *American Journal of Semiotics*, 8 (1991), 1-2, pp. 113 – 135 (pp. 118 – 119), in Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, p. 70.

<sup>88</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.93.

women they find it both desirable and necessary to disregard the 'cultural authority' of masculinist African literature, which constitutes the dominant discourse.<sup>89</sup> This study will demonstrate that they achieve this by destroying male stereotypes of African women, disrupting accepted models of normative femininity, and representing women's society, which situates them in an 'in-between space' in relation to traditional male-centred African narratives.<sup>90</sup> Textual interruption of the masculinist-gendered text can be defined as the acknowledgement and insertion of 'a women's vocality'.<sup>91</sup> This presents itself in the form of African women writers' focus upon women's conversations,<sup>92</sup> for instance, in Macgoye's *The Present Moment*.<sup>93</sup> It can be inferred that the representation of dialogue between and amongst women is an important aspect of African women's writing, since it does not constitute a part of the masculinist tradition and so is representative of an aspect of their boundary crossings. Boehmer states that 'women's talk can be interpreted not only as a way of life but as a mode of self-making'.<sup>94</sup> Her argument that women's conversing generates a re-negotiation of identity forms a link with the subversion of the female role of storyteller and thereby advances a sense of female autonomy.

Temporal/territorial alteration is concerned with the alteration of the subjects generally related to the traditional nationalist text. Boehmer states that temporal/territorial alteration:

involves *changing the subjects* that have dominated the nationalist text – and therefore questioning the centrality of the male-defined nation as *the* key historical player in the post-independence period. Where women tell the story of their own experience, they map their own geographical perspectives, scry [sic] their own history and so, necessarily, contest official representations of a nationalist reality.<sup>95</sup>

African women writers who refuse to write about men and male exploits and instead represent alternative female characters at variance with those 'that have dominated the

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<sup>89</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.51.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>91</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.94.

<sup>92</sup> African women writers' focus upon women's conversations is further explored in Chapter 4. However, Mugambi acknowledges the presence of female writers' 'assertive feminist stances' in the traditional male activity of radio song writing. Helen Nabasuta Mugambi, 'Intersections: Gender, Orality, Text, and Female Space in Contemporary Kiganda Radio Songs. (Women as Oral Artists).', *Research in African Literatures*, 25:3 (1994), pp. 47 – 71, in *Expanded Academic ASAP* (Thomson Gale: University of Derby, 17 Oct., 2006) <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=EAIM&docId=A15778851&source=gale&srcprod=EAIM&userGroupName=derby&version=1.0> [accessed 17 October 2006], pp. 1 – 21 (p. 11).

<sup>93</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *The Present Moment* (London: Heinemann, 1987)

<sup>94</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.98.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp.94-95.



nationalist text',<sup>96</sup> as in Macgoye's *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, Ogot's *The Strange Bride* and Kimenye's *The Runaway Bride*, challenge and question male-defined nationalism by giving the silenced and marginalized female perspective.<sup>97</sup> This is illustrated by African women writers' concentration upon women's society and community.

An alternative challenge to African masculinist texts is the children's writing of Kimenye and Macgoye. Their themes represent a significant difference to 'the subjects that have dominated the nationalist text', as well as to African women writers' preoccupation with feminist concerns.<sup>98</sup> Kimenye and Macgoye appropriate and subvert what is traditionally regarded as 'women's talk'<sup>99</sup> through their utilisation and development of the African woman's traditional experience and role of storyteller: a role regarded by the African male as one that ascribes 'normative femininity' to the African woman. They merge the role of the storyteller with the contemporary writers' role, employing old forms in new ways to relate contemporary narratives, as opposed to the traditional myths and folklore. This enables them to simultaneously challenge and transgress the boundaries associated with the traditional masculinist African novel, the 'normative femininity' of the African woman storyteller, and to 'make one's own place and narrative'.<sup>100</sup>

### Reclamation of Self and Critical Transformations

Ogundipe-Leslie and Davies highlight the importance of emancipatory African women's/writers' voices, and the shift towards new and challenging women's discourses that possess the power to alter accepted constructions and perceptions of African women in the struggle for the reclamation of self, and the chance to reach one's full potential:

Our work, writings and exhortations as women in various forms and media show that we want to end our silences and speak our truths as we know them. We wish to have power which positively promotes Life in all its forms; power to remove from our path anything, person or structure which threatens to limit our potential for full human growth as the other half of Life's gendered reality; power to

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<sup>96</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, pp.94-95.

<sup>97</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* (London: Macmillan Press, 1993), Grace Ogot, *The Strange Bride* (Nairobi: East African Educational, 1983; repr. 1998), and Barbara Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

<sup>98</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, pp.94-95.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.94.

collapse all screens which threaten to obscure our women's eyes from the beauty of the world.<sup>101</sup>

Transformational discourses then can be assigned to those discourses which both challenge and re-create, which seek to begin anew on different and more humane grounds, which combine intellectual work with activism and creativity.<sup>102</sup>

Application of Ogundipe-Leslie's theorizing of the African woman writer's critical transformations to the subjects of this study will demonstrate their transgression of generally accepted boundaries in relation to gender, identity, culture and the 'Other'.

It is important to analyse the articulation of these transformational discourses to discover the variety of ways used by African women writers in their attempt to dislodge oppressive intellectual, political and domestic behaviour. Ogundipe-Leslie states that 'the female writer should be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman and as a Third World person'.<sup>103</sup> With regard to this study, my interest lies in the African woman writer's commitment 'as a woman', which necessitates 'delineating the experience of women as women, telling what it is to be a woman, destroying male stereotypes of women'.<sup>104</sup>

Detailing a female stereotype prominent in African literature, Ogundipe-Leslie states:

There is the figure of the "sweet mother," the all-accepting creature of fecundity and self-sacrifice. This figure is often conflated with Mother Africa, with eternal and abstract Beauty and with inspiration, artistic or otherwise.<sup>105</sup>

Boehmer similarly dislikes the Mother Africa stereotype/image, regarding it as a 'passive role/metaphor'<sup>106</sup> that symbolically positions women above men whilst in reality keeping them below men,<sup>107</sup> since it is men who traditionally fight for nationalism, and women who are regarded as the upholders of tradition and culture. As Macgoye's *Coming to Birth* (1986) illustrates, acceptance of the Mother Africa and the "sweet mother" stereotypes severely confine African women, implying condemnation of women who cannot or do not want to have children, and also

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<sup>101</sup> Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, 'Foreword', *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994).

<sup>102</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, 'Preface - On Hearing Transformational Discourses and Hearing Women's Voices: "Find(ing) a Light-Filled Place"', in Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994), pp. xi – xvi (p. xvi).

<sup>103</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-creating Ourselves*, p.63.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>106</sup> Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, p.14.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.29.



playing a part in African women's interpellation into the domesticity and passivity associated with normative femininity.

### Writing for Children

In *The Signifying Monkey* Gates theorizes African folktales and the African American oral tradition of Signifyin(g) highlighting the existence of an African approach to writing and performance that signifies in a different way to the Western/European literary tradition which is inextricably linked to black African women's writing. I argue that the process of Signifyin(g) enables Kimenye's and Macgoye's children's writing to transgress various boundaries in order to signify to both African women, and children.

Gates's theory of Signifyin(g) draws on, develops, and Signifies upon both Alan Dundes's suggestions regarding the origins of Signifyin(g), and Roger D. Abrahams's definition of the employment of the term Signifyin(g) in black discourse.<sup>108</sup> For Gates, "Signifyin(g)" is associated with, and derives its signification from the black word, whilst "signifying" derives its signification from the white word and its associations with Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of sign/signifier/signified. Offering an explanation for the meaning of the black word "Signifyin(g)" through reference to the white term, Gates states:

Black people colonized a white sign. [...] Black people vacated this signifier, then – incredibly – substituted as its concept a signified that stands for the system of rhetorical strategies peculiar to their own vernacular tradition. Rhetoric, then, has supplanted semantics in this most literal meta-confrontation within the structure of the sign.<sup>109</sup>

Therefore, the concept Signify is thus inseparably linked with black vernacular rhetorical strategies and embodies very different meanings to the term signify.<sup>110</sup> My central argument is that Signifyin(g) carries with it the trace meaning of signifying which results in the double-voiced nature of the text,<sup>111</sup> and relates Signifyin(g) to

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<sup>108</sup> Gates, pp.53-54.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>110</sup> Laretta Henderson, 'The Black Arts Movement and African American Young Adult Literature: An Evaluation of Narrative Style', *Children's Literature in Education*, 36:4 (December 2005), 299 – 323. Although it is not a priority of this study, Henderson demonstrates that one way of approaching black English vernacular is through the rhythm of language and words.

<sup>111</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin cited in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 50. Bakhtin describes Signifyin(g)'s relation to signifying as a 'double-voiced word'.

Mikhail M. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism: the continual unmerged polyphonic dialogue with other consciousnesses, works, and writers that exist within a text.<sup>112</sup>

The double-voiced nature of Signifyin(g) incorporates within its rhetorical strategies the literary form of intertextuality. Gates states:

Signifyin(g) is black double-voicedness; because it always entails formal revision of an intertextual relation, [...] I find it an ideal metaphor for black literary criticism, for the formal manner in which texts seem concerned to address their antecedents. Repetition, with a signal difference, is fundamental to the nature of Signifyin(g).<sup>113</sup>

Hence, the act of Signifyin(g) is demonstrated through the process of repetition and revision which occurs with the employment of intertextual references. Critics who have engaged with, and applied this aspect of Gates's theorizing of Signifyin(g) include Toni Morrison, Yukiko Fukase, Malin Walther Pereira, Henry J. Elam, Jr., Kim Euell, and Alisa Solomon.<sup>114</sup> It is notable that in Kimenye's and Macgoye's writings for children, the double-voiced nature of Signifyin(g) incorporates within its rhetorical strategies the literary form of intertextuality. Their intertextual antecedents can thus comprise both Western and African canonical texts in addition to myths, folklore, and traditional themes and motifs. In Chapter 5, I illustrate that Kimenye's *Moses* series of stories can be read as an example of her refiguring of Richmal Crompton's *William* stories and the creation of the African tradition of schoolboy adventure stories. Gates states:

Writers Signify upon each other's texts by rewriting the received textual tradition. This can be accomplished by the revision of tropes. This sort of Signifyin(g) revision serves, if successful, to create a tradition, by defining the relation of the text at hand to the tradition.<sup>115</sup>

Hence, Gates's theorizing can be applied to 'African' women writers who also Signify on texts, topoi or tropes through their refiguring and repetition of experiences

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<sup>112</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981; 1992), pp. 291 – 293.

<sup>113</sup> Gates, p.51.

<sup>114</sup> See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), Yukiko Fukase, "'Signifyin(g)' upon Huck Finn: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as a Cultural Artifact', <[http://www.flet.keio.ac.jp/~colloq/articles/backnumber/Col\\_20\\_FukaseYukiko.pdf#search=%20huck%22](http://www.flet.keio.ac.jp/~colloq/articles/backnumber/Col_20_FukaseYukiko.pdf#search=%20huck%22)> [accessed 3 October 2006], Malin Walther Pereira, 'Be(e)ing and "Truth": *Tar Baby's* Signifying on Sylvia Plath's Bee Poems', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 42:4 (Winter 1996), 526 – 534, Harry J. Elam Jr., 'Signifyin(g) on African American Theatre: *The Colored Museum* by George Wolfe', *Theatre Journal*, 44 (1992), 291 – 303, Kim Euell, 'Signifyin(g) Ritual: Subverting Stereotypes, Salvaging Icons. (Black Racial and Gender Stereotypes and Icons)', *African American Review*, 31:4 (Winter 1997), 667 – 669, and Alisa Solomon, 'Signifying on the Signifyin: The Plays of Suzan-Lori Parks', *Theatre*, 21:3 (1990), 73 – 80.

<sup>115</sup> Gates, p.124.



pertinent to African readers who know, and are familiar with a shared (African) cultural identity, as in, for example, Kimenye's *Moses* series of stories, and Macgoye's *The Black Hand Gang* books. This leads me to question the extent to which Kimenye's and Macgoye's children's writing incorporates a hidden polemic.

Kimenye's intertextual 'African' Signifyin(g) upon Eurocentric texts transgresses boundaries related to the Eurocentric texts refigured. Additionally, boundary crossings occur due to the subversion of the traditional use of African women's orature to address a contemporary black African child readership through the Afrocentric refiguring of texts. Hence, whilst examining the extent to which the concept of Signifyin(g) is apparent in Kimenye's and Macgoye's children's writing, I will also be analysing how their stories signify - in the manner of reader response - since the monkey signifies different things to different readers.

Furthermore, I propose that Western readers, editors and critics unfamiliar with Afrocentric writing and 'African' women writers' Signifyin(g) are ill equipped to interpret, edit and critique such writing due to their failure to understand how these texts Signify/signify. Consequently, I suggest that because of the representation and refiguring of a shared African cultural identity, Kimenye and Macgoye's Signifyin(g) children's writing signifies to African child readers in a way that Eurocentric children's writing cannot.

## **Postcoloniality and the Phenomenon of the European Diaspora**

### **(i) 'African' Women Writers, Agency and Strategic Location**

Said's main methodological device for studying the author is strategic location, which he defines as:

[...] a way of describing the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about. [...] I use the notion of strategy simply to identify the problem every writer on the Orient has faced: how to get hold of it, how to approach it, how not to be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope, its awful dimensions. Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text - all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p.20.

It would seem that the concept of strategic location is concerned with the author as a human subject within his/her own text/circumstances and therefore relates to the Orientalist writer/scholar's deliberate positioning within the text in relation to the Orient, and his/her 'highly artificial [...] *representations*' as opposed to "natural" depictions of the Orient'.<sup>117</sup>

Said's notion of strategic location can be successfully applied to the writers under analysis here: they deliberately position themselves in relation to their texts with the express intention of re-positioning/re-presenting a non-Western culture that does not comply with the Western textual attitude stimulated by Orientalist texts. The writers transgress accepted cultural boundaries since the dominant Western discourse privileges prejudiced and partial representations of non-Western culture. Additionally, the writers' textual interruption through African women's vocality, and their temporal/territorial alteration to incorporate the female condition and children's narratives challenge male writers' stereotypes of normative femininity associated with the African literary tradition. This strategically locates 'African' women writers in opposition to the dominant African male/patriarchal discourse, whilst being representative of their boundary transgression on a number of levels.

Engaging with Said's thinking relating to the idea of the author as a human subject within his/her own text/circumstances, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of 'representation' also seems apt when considering the writers of this study. Spivak suggests that two senses of the term representation exist. To represent can mean: to re-present as in an image, or verbally/textually in a philosophical manner (which does not involve speaking on behalf of, or in place of the absent consciousness); yet it also means to speak on behalf of/stand in for the absent consciousness/oppressed group in the manner of politics. It is the latter meaning of the term that is my concern, since when speaking on behalf of some one/body the need arises to consider whose agenda is being put forward since it is not necessarily the agenda of the absent consciousness. Therefore, Spivak proposes that representation carries with it 'suggestions of substitution' and a 'transformation of consciousness' because the absent consciousness/oppressed are not seen and heard to speak/act for themselves.<sup>118</sup> I will

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>118</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 66 – 111, p.71 & p.72.



be examining select texts by the writers to determine whether they are guilty of filtering the interests of indigenous Africans through their own covert interests.

## (ii) 'African' Women Writers in the Third Space of Cultural Difference

Bhabha's concept of cultural difference challenges the dominant Orientalist positioning of Western discourse, and its subsequent representations of non-Europeans and hybridization not accommodated by *Orientalism*. Bhabha articulates an alternative approach:

The move away from the singularities of "class" or "gender" as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.<sup>118</sup>

This promotes fresh modes of thinking about identity that are more advanced than totalizing systems such as national identity, or potentially universalizing systems like multiculturalism, because multiculturalism and cultural diversity can be responsible for suppressing difference in an attempt at homogenization. According to Bhabha, both are potentially universalising, and hence containing, for in Western society's attempt to acknowledge and accommodate alternative cultures, it still desires to 'locate them within [its] own grid' or within boundaries of its own making.<sup>119</sup> Hence, Bhabha's criticism is that although democratic dominant cultures recognise that cultural diversity is a positive attitude to foster there is an over-riding tendency towards 'a creation of cultural diversity and a containment of cultural difference'.<sup>120</sup> Bhabha hereby suggests that in arguing for diversity and multiculturalism the dominant culture suppresses cultural difference. In a world ever more obsessed with multiculturalism and cultural diversity, or the melting pot world space, Bhabha voices an interesting point. That is, the danger that political identity becomes lost through the weakening or diluting that it is inevitably subject to upon assimilation into a

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<sup>118</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.

<sup>119</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha', *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 207 – 221 (p. 208).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p.208.



multicultural society. It therefore becomes [sup]pressed into a world space still defined by the dominant cultures admitting the 'Other' into the same [multicultural] world space they create, control and direct. Hence Bhabha states:

The whole nature of the public sphere is changing so that we really do need the notion of a politics which is based on unequal, uneven, multiple and *potentially antagonistic*, political identities.<sup>122</sup>

Cultural difference therefore challenges accepted cultural grand narratives such as national identity through the stimulation of new identities and new notions of civilisation that construct in-between spaces or, a Third Space that is not defined by boundaries and consequently does not limit or suppress.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, when Bhabha refers to cultural differences as 'hybrid sites of meaning',<sup>124</sup> he is drawing on Bakhtin's linguistic theorizing.<sup>125</sup> In the Bakhtinian sense, hybridity relates specifically to 'different linguistic consciousnesses'.<sup>126</sup> However, Bhabha appropriates the concept and develops it in relation to identity.

The writers of this study occupy in-between spaces on more than one level. The obvious cultural difference to address is the in-between space, which the writers occupy due to their adoption of a culture and perspective at odds with their inherited culture, which forces them into a Third Space between heritages and/or cultures.<sup>127</sup> Traditionally, the perception of Huxley is of one of the main upholders of colonialism in Kenya. Nevertheless, *Red Strangers* (1939) situates her in an in-between space due to her transgression of European cultural boundaries through her adoption of a Gikuyu perspective from which emanates the unflattering representation of Europeans and their customs. Born and educated in Britain, Kimenye regards herself as an indigenous Ugandan by birth, as previously noted. Her mixed heritage status indisputably situates her in an in-between space with the potential to be regarded as an outsider by both black and white persons. However, although only inspired to write

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p.208.

<sup>123</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp.53-56.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p.234.

<sup>125</sup> Bakhtin, p.358.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.429.

<sup>127</sup> In applying Bhabha's notion of the Third Space to the subjects of this thesis, I am drawing on the interpretation of Torika Bolatagici (2004), Flora Anthias (2001), and Ruth Arber (2000) who view it as a transgressive borderland space that contests the relevancy and fixedness of racial and cultural divisions. See Torika Bolatagici, 'Claiming the (N)either/ (N)or of 'Third Space': (Re)presenting Hybrid Identity and the Embodiment of Mixed Race', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 25:1 (2004), pp. 75 – 85, Flora Anthias, 'New Hybridities, Old Concepts: The Limits of Culture', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24:4 (2001), pp.619 – 641, and Ruth Arber, 'Defining Positioning within Politics of Difference: Negotiating Spaces 'In Between'', *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 3:1 (2000), pp. 45 – 63.



when residing in East Africa, her exposure to both African and British/European cultures is obvious in conversation with her and in her writing. A nationalized Kenyan, Macgoye's inherited culture is British/European whilst her adopted culture is Kenyan/Luo. Notable in all her writing and correspondence is her adoption and identification with an African perspective, which illustrates her appropriation of an in-between space and her transgression of cultural boundaries from both a British and an African perspective, which situates her in the Third Space. Finally, Ogot, an indigenous Kenyan writer, would not appear to fit into Bhabha's notion of cultural difference or in-between spaces at first glance. As the only woman assistant minister in the cabinet of President Moi, and a Member of Parliament and representative to the United Nations for Kenya, however, she transgresses cultural boundaries, occupying the in-between space of a woman in a predominantly male world, the like of which she represents in *The Graduate* (1980). Furthermore, her writing illustrates her preoccupation with the representation of traditional Luo culture in a pre-colonial era. This locates her as a contemporary black African female writer in the in-between space of modern and traditional Kenya. Consequently, I perceive her examination of the position of the native, colonial, and post-independent citizen as a way of 'elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity.'<sup>128</sup> My analysis of the writers' cultural difference through their transgression of boundaries of culture and heritage will thus illustrate Bhabha's affirmation that 'by exploring the Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves', thereby configuring new identities.<sup>129</sup>

The African woman's traditional use of words centres on the art of orature, for example singing songs, and telling myths and legends to children in the village enclosure. By subverting women's traditional role of storyteller to address contemporary issues relating to gender, identity, culture and the 'Other' relevant to African youth, Kimenye and Macgoye combine this traditional role with the contemporary 'African' woman writer's role. They thereby express their cultural difference, whilst simultaneously 'initiat[ing] new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration'.<sup>130</sup> Through the expression of their cultural differences on these various levels, I intend to argue that the 'African' women writers of this study

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<sup>128</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.2.

transgress various cultural boundaries, thus challenging the notion of fixed cultural identities linked to nationality and the African writer, thereby enabling and engendering transgression and configuration of identities appropriate to contemporary African society.

Bhabha's proposal that cultural difference generates a Third Space which results in new hybrid forms of identity is challenged by Young, however, who states, 'the interval that we assert between ourselves and the past may be much less than we assume. We may be more bound up with its categories than we like to think'.<sup>131</sup> Young appears to suggest that the imaginary gap that forms the in-between space is perhaps not as wide as Bhabha intimates it is. Thus, whilst the border crossings of the subjects of this study are a recognisable phenomenon, they may not be as complex as the writers' hybrid identities would initially seem to indicate. By interrogating the conflicts that arise in the texts, I will investigate the extent to which their (un)conscious voyages into the European diaspora in Africa validate Young's statement.

### African 'Woman', Etymology and Transgression

A particular aspect of this thesis's originality stems from my exploration of the African-centred concepts of 'woman' and the etymological/conceptual link to the transgressive behaviour of African women, and space and how African-centred concepts can ultimately be applied to enhance the dialectics within Third Space and contact zone. My approach incorporates the translation and analysis of the differing meanings attached to the terms 'woman' and 'space' in a variety of African languages, for example: Luganda, Acholi (or Acoli), Dholuo and Gikuyu.

The traditional African woman who leaves her clan to marry can always be perceived as a visitor and necessarily has to travel to create and appropriate the Third Space (wife, mother, storyteller). Huxley's, Kimenye's, Macgoye's, and Ogot's roles of mothers and storytellers, coupled with their concentration upon perspectives at odds with their inherited culture positions them in the Third Space. Similarly, Paulina highlights this notion in Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*, and Nyawir in Ogot's *The Strange Bride*, both of whom cross-geographical boundaries to inhabit the African wife's space.

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<sup>131</sup> Young, p.28.



In Luganda, the etymology of *mukyala* and *omukyala* illustrates that the terms carry with them the associations of visitor/stranger.<sup>132</sup> *Mukyala* (the polite alternative to *Mukazi*, see below), meaning lady, and *omukyala*, meaning lady/wife, both derive from the root *kyala* – visit. *Kyala* implies that the African woman occupies a different space because she is always a visitor. The connotation is that the visitor, or traveller, goes out into the unknown entering and embracing other cultures in the contact zone of the ‘Borderlands’.<sup>133</sup>

*Mukazi*, meaning woman, derives from the root *mu*, which means one who came alone. By extension it can also be interpreted as carrying with it the missing presence of the meaning of visitor (refer to *kyala* above.) *Mukazi* is perceived as a critical discourse. It is regarded as insulting to use in relation to an African woman due to the implication of aggression and single-mindedness derived from the allusion of oneness regarded as transgressive. However, it simultaneously points to an autonomous African woman inhabiting a contact zone, hence, creating and occupying her own space or *ekyaanya* and crossing boundaries to do so: exemplified by Kimenye’s mother-in-law, or the Baganda woman Lucretia whom Kimenye based Nantondo on in the *Kalasanda* books.<sup>134</sup> *Ekyaanya* (Luganda) relates to the concept of having one’s own space, as opposed to *bbanga* (Luganda), the concept of space: notion of outer space; an interval between points; an interval of time etc. Thus, in denoting an African woman asserting her presence, *mukazi* combines the concepts of gender, space, and identity thus exhibiting positive connotations for the African feminist.

Kimenye’s and Macgoye’s development of traditional African women’s orature into their womanist discourse, in particular, comprises the simultaneous combination of European and African forms of storytelling, and can similarly be regarded as a transgression of the boundaries of orature. The meeting of African and European concepts pertaining to both the notion of ‘woman’ and storytelling,

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<sup>132</sup> The literal meaning of the Luganda terms for ‘woman’ were discussed and confirmed in an unpublished interview between Professor Livingstone Walusimbi, Makerere University Institute of Languages, Kampala, Uganda and Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

<sup>133</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), Preface.

<sup>134</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye, 6 July 2006. Describing her mother-in-law as ‘a law unto herself’ and Lucretia as indifferent to the opinion of others, both individuals can be perceived as exhibiting a particularly strong sense of oneness.

discussed in Chapter 5, facilitates my proposed demonstration of how meaning can be enhanced in an area frequently dismissed as unimportant.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Aaron Mushengyezi confirms that narratives for African children represent a genre that has not been of much interest to many African academics. Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Aaron Mushengyezi, Makerere University, 25 March 2008. Refer to Chapter 5.



## 2. Space and 'African' Women Writers

### Delineating Spatial Boundaries

This chapter is concerned with the dialectics surrounding the notion of space and its relation to the transgression of boundaries of gender, identity, culture and the 'Other' as it relates to both the subjects of this thesis and their texts. Because of their European/African cultural experience, my concern is therefore to interrogate the notion of the hybridization of Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye, and Ogot through an examination of the conditions that are conducive to, and engender their hybridized state in conjunction with an analysis of select texts to illustrate how hybridization is manifest therein.

Bhabha argues that the occupation of 'in-between spaces' engenders the configuration of new identities.<sup>1</sup> Living in-between cultures and negotiating new 'African' identities through their cross-cultural narratives situates Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot in the 'contact zone' and defines them as occupying a new space.<sup>2</sup> To fully comprehend the relevance of the notion of hybridization in relation to these 'African' women writers and relate it to the space they occupy and their subsequent transgression of boundaries in the construction of identity, it is useful to take notice of the subtle differences in meaning signified by the terms contact zone, in-between spaces, and 'Third Space'.<sup>3</sup> In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mary Louise Pratt states that the notion of the "contact zone" is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historic disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect'.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa defines Borderlands as 'physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other', referring to the Borderland consciousness as 'a new *mestiza* consciousness'.<sup>5</sup> Further, what Bhabha refers to as an in-between or Third Space, Anzaldúa names '*los intersticios*', identifying it as the space that emerges upon

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<sup>1</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994;repr. 2006), p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge: London, 1992),pp. 6 – 7.

<sup>3</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 53 – 56.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1987), Preface and p. 20.

one's occupation of different worlds.<sup>6</sup> Borderland invokes the notion of the frontier, which for Pratt is associated with the contact zone where 'disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other' as depicted in *Red Strangers*.<sup>7</sup> The text focuses on four generations of a Gikuyu family and spans the years from pre-colonialism up to the late 1930s. The red strangers of the title are the first European settlers in a Gikuyu area and so called because of the effect of the sun upon their skin. Huxley's text presents a comprehensive illustration of the far-reaching effects of the coming together of these separate cultures in the contact zone. Her representation of the arrival of the first red strangers, their subsequent occupation of indigenous land, and attempts to impose British justice, highlight the ensuing conflicts whilst drawing attention to a budding 'new *mestiza* consciousness' beginning to emerge in some characters.

Bhabha uses the terms in-between spaces and Third Space interchangeably to refer to the space that emerges upon a person's occupation of two worlds or cultures. Appropriating Mikhail M. Bakhtin's theorizing of hybridization in language, Bhabha develops it in relation to postcolonial identity and 'cultural difference',<sup>8</sup> and hence he proposes that from 'that position of liminality'<sup>9</sup> where cultures come together, a Third Space is generated in 'the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference.'<sup>10</sup> Karanja in *Red Strangers* exemplifies this merging of cultural difference. He is the first-born son of Matu and Wanja, and he embodies the notion of the occupation of Third Space since aspects of traditional Gikuyu and European culture fuse to construct his identity. Karanja identifies with his inherited culture, yet as he is also exposed to European cultural influences, the area he occupies is the Third Space where the two cultures co-mingle. This is illustrated at Karanja's traditional circumcision ceremony:

When the day came Karanja was the best-dressed candidate of all. He had collected, at various times, much finery for the occasion, but of a different kind from which his father had used. He wore a bright-striped European jersey, and two stiff white collars in place of Colobus skins round his wrists. His legs were swathed with rattles made of small cans filled with stones. In his ears he wore yellow cigarette tins and he carried a bright Malacca cane.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Anzaldúa, p.77.

<sup>7</sup> Pratt, p.6.

<sup>8</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha', *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 207-221 (p. 209).

<sup>10</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.

<sup>11</sup> Elspeth Huxley, *Red Strangers* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 302.



Karanja, shaped by the coming together of two disparate worlds, does not feel obliged to wear the traditional costume for the occasion of his circumcision ceremony. Rather, he customizes it to reflect his own hybridity, carefully adapts his outfit to add his own personal twist on the traditional rattles and earrings, and incorporates items of European clothing. Crossing boundaries related to culture and identity, Huxley illustrates how Karanja is able to select the appropriate characteristics for him in a manner summed up by Crispin, his cousin. Crispin declares, 'some European customs are good and others are bad, and we should take only the good ones, and keep those of our own which do not offend God.'<sup>12</sup> The space Karanja occupies finds meaning in the overlap of the merging of the two worlds and thereby challenges fixed cultural identities.

Bhabha defines in-between spaces as 'moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences', and thus I proposed in Chapter 1 that the select writers inhabit in-between spaces on a number of levels.<sup>13</sup> However, that he uses the term in-between spaces interchangeably with Third Space to refer to the space occupied by an individual who exhibits the merging of cultural differences is problematic because of the inherent ambiguity of the term in-between spaces. There seems to be a fundamental difference in that the state of occupying an in-between space more accurately signifies an attitude of oscillation between different points, rather than the new and different space denoted by the term Third Space. Hence, it is more appropriate that a distinction is made between the meanings of the two terms. Like me, Kadiatu Kanneh regards in-between spaces as being reliant upon 'an understanding of uncertainty and oscillation, of the 'in-between' space between the Other and the Self – at once a position of confusion and privilege.'<sup>14</sup> Taking account of this definition, the state of occupying an in-between space is therefore more accurately to be understood as occurring when two disparate cultures come together but the merging that culminates in the production of the Third Space fails to occur. Rather than combining to form a new space, the two cultures occupied by the individual remain separate and continue to occupy opposite ends of the scale, the consequence of which is manifest by a vacillation of alternate perspectives as

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.387.

<sup>13</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Kadiatu Kanneh, 'History, 'Africa' and Modernity', *Interventions*, 1:1 (1998), 30 – 34 (p. 31).



illustrated by Huxley's shifting settler-African-settler viewpoint. From this point, this thesis therefore approaches Third Space as an area distinct from in-between spaces.

In *Red Strangers* (1939) Huxley adopts an African perspective yet she is at variance with the other writers in this study in that the space she occupies is different. Unlike Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot, having spent some of her childhood in Kenya she never lived there as an adult. Rather, she took regular extended visits, and travelled the continent of Africa widely during her life.<sup>15</sup> She thereby positions herself as a traveller/visitor and hence a stranger, as opposed to Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot who live(d) as indigenous members of the community. Consequently, although Huxley may regard herself as occupying the Third Space wherein two dissimilar cultures merge, her negotiation of the contact zone positions her in an in-between space where she bestrides two cultures.

Huxley resides in an in-between space because she tries to inhabit two separate worlds at once. Unlike the Third Space where two different cultures come together and merge to exhibit influences from each, occupation of an in-between space occurs when the cultures remain separate and at opposite ends of the spectrum. Huxley's body of writing highlights this because within it she exhibits a switching back and forth between perspectives, depending upon the point of view she is intent upon occupying at that time. Hence, her African semi-autobiographical works *The Flame Trees of Thika* (1959), *The Mottled Lizard* (1962) and *Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya* (1985) all exhibit a colonial settler perspective. Similarly, in the biography of Hugh Cholmondeley, the third Baron Delamere, *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya* (1935), she advocates settler life in Kenya. Moreover, she ignores the impact of colonialism upon the indigenous population in *White Man's Country*, and this incited criticism from the likes of William McGregor Ross and Margery Perham, whose opinion it was that Africa should be for indigenous Africans.<sup>16</sup> Prompted to consider and reply to the anti-white settlement views of critics like McGregor Ross and Perham, Huxley shifted her perspective in an attempt to put forward the African point of view and published *Red Strangers*. Once again, her perspective switches like a pendulum with the subsequent publication of *Race and*

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<sup>15</sup> C.S. Nicholls, *Elspeth Huxley: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> William McGregor Ross, Director of Public Works in British East Africa, and Margery Perham believed that Africa should be for Africans. McGregor Ross gave *White Man's Country* an unfavourable review in the *New Statesman* when it was published in May 1935 (see Nicholls, p. 109), whilst Perham's view was not to be ignored as she was regarded as 'the queen of colonial studies at Oxford', (Nicholls, p. 166).



*Politics in Kenya* (1944), however. This text further reinforces her position in England as the spokesperson of British settlers in Kenya.

### Elsbeth Huxley: A Foot in Each Camp

Huxley's personal retreat from the Third Space problematizes her position as a writer preoccupied with Africa. One might assume that given the context of her life experience her identity would have been hybridised as a result of a merging of European and African influences. However, her attempt to inhabit two contrasting perspectives in her narratives, whether consciously or unconsciously, results in ambivalence. Hence, she is widely regarded as the voice of colonial Kenya while African writers and critics such as Micere Githae-Mugo and Chinua Achebe define her as an 'outsider',<sup>17</sup> even denouncing her for 'consider[ing] herself an African'.<sup>18</sup> In her writing, Boehmer suggests that women writing about settler experience and traveller accounts during the period of Empire position themselves in such a way as to be 'aslant male traditions of representation while endorsing the dominant cultural values of the day' hence accounting for what Sara Mills refers to as the 'conflicting discourse of femininity'.<sup>19</sup> Mills suggests that women travel writers occupy a marginal position at home and in the colonies and so face 'different textual constraints' to male writers of the time.<sup>20</sup> As a result, they affirm and participate in the dominant colonial discourse whilst also crossing boundaries related to literary conventions to write like a woman. This is manifest in the form of the depiction of recognisable indigenous groups or individuals, as opposed to an unidentifiable mass represented in masculine colonial discourse. Through her application of Mills' concept of the conflicting discourse of femininity to Huxley's narratives, Seniorina Wendoh suggests that Huxley unsettles colonialist discourse whilst being a part of it.<sup>21</sup> My analysis of *Red Strangers* develops this notion by approaching Huxley's text

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<sup>17</sup> Micere Githae-Mugo, *Visions of Africa: The Fiction of Chinua Achebe, Margaret Laurence, Elspeth Huxley and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978), p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 75 and Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991; repr. 2004), p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991; repr. 2004), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> See Seniorina Wendoh, *Colonial and Postcolonial Representation in Kenyan Writing, with Particular Reference to Richard Meinertzhagen, Elspeth Huxley, Karen Blixen, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Meja Mwangi and Rebeka Njau* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1997), p. 99.



through the above definition of the state of being in-between, or keeping a foot in each camp. Thus, while acknowledging Huxley's own occupation of an in-between space because of her wavering position with regard to colonial and Gikuyu perspectives, I also draw on the notion of Third Space and contact zone in an effort to identify the extent to which hybridisation is manifest within the text.

Huxley reveals her bestriding of two cultures through the narrative points of view of her texts. The commissioning of Huxley's first book, *White Man's Country*, signalled her unambiguous Eurocentric colonial perspective and resulted in her becoming widely known as 'the veritable proponent of British imperialism in Africa'.<sup>22</sup> Hence, she explains:

Obviously a civilised race must be superior to a savage one. There could be no question, therefore, but that the white man was paramount, and must remain so until the native became – if he ever did – the intellectual equal of the European. This could not occur in a generation or two, because intellectual equality implies more than imitation. It implies initiation. The African, that is to say, must be able to design an engine, not only run it; to create literature and not only read it. Until he could do these things as well as a European – and this, people believed, must be a question of centuries, perhaps even eternity – the white man must be paramount.<sup>23</sup>

Huxley's racist attitude of benevolent tolerance, parent to child, the white man as superior educator, making imperialism almost a duty of care, brings to the fore the European perception of the merit of the British civilising mission in Africa and the championing of white rule in Kenya. Furthermore, the text highlights the European stereotyping of the Masai people as noble savages.<sup>24</sup> Even so, Europeans already considered Huxley something of an expert on Africa prior to the publication of *White Man's Country*. This was due to an impressive publishing record with various East African newspapers and the fact that she spent the majority of her childhood in colonial Kenya, which she depicts in *The Flame Trees of Thika* and *The Mottled Lizard*. Huxley's colonial perspective prevails in both texts, and evidence of her perpetuation of European literary stereotypes of Africa and Africans abound. In *The Flame Trees of Thika* Mrs Oram exclaims:

Oh, but the whole country is a garden; a garden God has planted. Look what he has provided – streams to drink from, trees for shade, wild fruits and honey, birds and beasts for company. [...] There's nothing I love better than to walk in the

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<sup>22</sup> G.W. Burnett, 'Red Strangers', *Journal of Third World Studies*, Fall (2002), pp. 289 – 290, p. 289.

<sup>23</sup> Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya*, 2 vols (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974) 1 p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152 – 154.



wilds and return with my hands full of the bright jewels of veld and forest – the shy creepers, pink storm lilies, humble forget-me-nots.<sup>25</sup>

Githae-Mugo argues that this passage reflects the love affair Huxley had with the stunning scenery and climate of Kenya, often taken for granted by Kenyans.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, also represented here is an Africa that is the opposite of England - ‘the wilds’. It is an awe-inspiring landscape filled with glorious flora and fauna - but no people, or at least none that are regarded as such since it appears there are only ‘birds and beasts for company’. Huxley’s narrative is influenced by the dominant ideology, as illustrated by her ‘Othering’ of Africans through her use of binary opposites and animal-like imagery. In *The Mottled Lizard*, she juxtaposes ‘sedate’ European behaviour with the ‘excitement and commotion’ of the Africans, thereby acknowledging the superiority of the civilised European and reinforcing the inferiority of the uncivilised native.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in *The Flame Trees of Thika* the women look like ‘big brown snails’ and live a ‘pack-animal existence’ whilst the men walk ‘with a loping stride’, and their plaited hair resembles ‘the fleece of a long-haired sheep’.<sup>28</sup> It is this type of writing that leads Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o to describe Huxley and her work as follows:

Elspeth Huxley [...] is really a scribbler of tourist guides and anaemic settler polemics blown up to the size of books. The most creative things about her writing are her titles – *The Flame Trees of Thika* and *The Mottled Lizard*, for instance – because in them she lets herself be inspired by native life and landscape. Beyond the title and the glossy covers, there is only emptiness, and emptiness as a defence of oppression has never made a great subject for literature.<sup>29</sup>

By contrast, Phyllis Lassner argues that in Huxley’s narratives ‘both the Kikuyu and the British have been viewed through the lens of each other,’ thereby indicating that in her writing Huxley assumes both viewpoints.<sup>30</sup>

In *Red Strangers*, Huxley’s narrative point of view seemingly switches from the colonial to that of the Gikuyu. She thereby crosses colonial cultural boundaries in an effort to inhabit an indigenous space with the expressed intention of representing ‘the coming of the European to a part of Africa previously untouched by white

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<sup>25</sup> Elspeth Huxley, *The Flame Trees of Thika: Memories of an African Childhood* (New York: Penguin, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Githae-Mugo, p.16.

<sup>27</sup> Elspeth Huxley, *The Mottled Lizard* (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Huxley, *The Flame Trees of Thika*, p.14.

<sup>29</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary* (London: Heinemann, 1981) p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> Phyllis Lassner, *Colonial Strangers: Women Writing the End of the British Empire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p. 122.

influence as it appeared to one family of one tribe living in one small district in one part of Africa'.<sup>31</sup> Richard Dawkins describes *Red Strangers* as 'a virtuoso feat of identification with another culture' and so declares Huxley's journeying into the space of another a success.<sup>32</sup> However, Dawkins's comments, along with European colonialist tributes that regard *Red Strangers* as 'one of the finest literary productions of settler Kenya',<sup>33</sup> juxtaposed with Thiong'o's dismissal of Huxley's narratives and other postcolonial critics' accusations of her perpetuation of a colonial perspective,<sup>34</sup> brings to the fore the issue in question. That is, the extent to which Huxley successfully identifies with the Gikuyu perspective in *Red Strangers*, if at all.

Huxley's attention to the task of encouraging the European reader to see with a different pair of eyes results in her defamiliarization of objects and things familiar to her intended audience. In his 'Introduction' to *Red Strangers* Dawkins states, 'we recognize as if from a distance [...] we are never once told in European terms. [...] We see all through Kikuyu eyes'.<sup>35</sup> However, Dawkins does not critically analyse Huxley's text, which contains numerous examples of re-presentation of the familiar to make it appear strange. Thus, he believes he is seeing with Gikuyu eyes when he recognises a pocket watch that is re-presented as 'a charm which made a noise like water dripping from a roof. On its surface were two small sticks that moved as slowly as chameleons, and of their own accord'; a tap as 'a spring [...] summoned out of a hole in the wall, and then made to cease again'; and a car as an:

animal [...] shaped like a small house that moved. It made a loud noise [...] and gave out an evil smell, and he could not understand how it went forward, unless it was propelled by spirits. It did not obey its owner so well as the animal which he later learnt to call a horse.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, in her endeavour to demonstrate that these familiar European objects are unfamiliar to the Gikuyu, Huxley participates in the discourse of Orientalism and

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<sup>31</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.xvi.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Dawkins, *A Devil's Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science, and Love* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), p. 224.

<sup>33</sup> C.J.D. Duder, 'Love and the Lions: The Image of White Settlement in Kenya in Popular Fiction, 1919-1939', *African Affairs* 90 (1991), pp. 427-438 (p. 437)

<sup>34</sup> See Wendoh, (1997). Wendoh argues that *Red Strangers* merely 'reiterates and emphasises colonialist assumptions', p. 115. Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974). Mphahlele suggests that African characters in *Red Strangers* are like 'pre-historic man' not willing to take action to alter the course of events, p. 178. Githae-Mugo, (1978). Githae Mugo views Huxley's text 'as a colonial depiction of traditional Gikuyu society' (p. 49) and states 'Elsbeth Huxley is known in circles of the Western world as perhaps Kenya's finest writer, although no serious critic of African literature seems to have advanced this theory so far (p. 20).

<sup>35</sup> Richard Dawkins, 'Introduction' in Elspeth Huxley, *Red Strangers* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p.viii.

<sup>36</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.153, p.299, & pp.224-225.



constructs the Gikuyu as primitive. Said explains that 'Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them").'<sup>37</sup> Huxley's attempt to traverse cultural boundaries and re-present things from the Gikuyu perspective polarizes the distinction between European and Gikuyu, effectively increasing the divide between the cultures, and so reinforcing the sense of African inferiority and 'Otherness'.

Similarly, dwelling on the pre-colonial tribal conflicts of the Gikuyu has the effect of further emphasising the sense of 'Otherness'. The text opens with the image of 'a column of shining-skinned young Kikuyu warriors swinging along the forest's edge towards the plains, like a ripple of wind across a field of ripening grain, on the way to war'.<sup>38</sup> We learn from the narrator that 'the lust for cattle and for glory was in every man's heart',<sup>39</sup> and we are presented with a portrait of an adrenaline-fuelled Muthengi about to go into battle with the Masai. The narrator states:

Muthengi gazed at them in exhilaration, lust of battle mingling with fear and admiration in his heart. [...] His limbs began to quiver like the wings of a sunbird when its beak sucks honey from a red-hot poker bloom, and his blood raced wildly in his veins.<sup>40</sup>

Depicting Muthengi thus consumed with nervous energy for the oncoming battle, tension heightened to an almost sexual pitch, and filled with the knowledge that within minutes he could be a killer or be killed, Huxley here aligns Muthengi with the basest human emotions. In so doing, she dismisses those characteristics that humanize him and brings to the fore those which animalise him by highlighting that he anticipates the forthcoming fight with a tension and rage that is comparable with that of rival males in the animal kingdom competing for mating rights. Thus, in trying to represent the pre-colonial role of tribal conflict to a Western audience, Huxley (un)consciously justifies the European civilising mission. A civilising mission which aims to enlighten 'the Kikuyu, who live in an ignorance as dark as night',<sup>41</sup> and bring the Eurocentric benefits of colonialism to Kenya, including the 'administering [of] justice'<sup>42</sup> and settling of lawsuits.<sup>43</sup> Rather than highlighting her

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<sup>37</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; repr. Penguin, 1995), p. 43.

<sup>38</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.241.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.

Gikuyu point of view it is therefore apparent that Huxley's attempted transgressions of cultural and racial boundaries through the employment of defamiliarization, and a focus on the indigenous preoccupation with warriors and war, are impeded by an inability to surmount European colonial influences. She thereby continues to maintain a foot in each camp.

I have argued that Huxley herself draws back from occupying the Third Space. It is ironical, therefore, that she represents characters in *Red Strangers* that occupy that hybrid Third Space wherein fresh ideas about the construction of identity are generated from the combining of aspects of diverse traditions and behaviours. Wendoh criticises Huxley for her feminisation of Matu because 'within African traditional masculinity [it] is held in contempt and scorn'.<sup>44</sup> The feminisation of an African male is disrespected and regarded as transgressive by Africans because it does not conform to the dominant ideology's construction of African normative masculinity. Yet an innovative way to regard Huxley's characterisation of Karanja is through the lens of Third Space in connection to gender related behaviours. We learn from the text that Gikuyu normative masculinity comprises aspects such as goat herding, fearlessness, wisdom, and a knowledge of magic.<sup>45</sup> By contrast, the criteria determining normative femininity include obedience, cooking and brewing beer, and tending the *shamba*.<sup>46</sup> Cutting through gender boundaries, Huxley reveals in Matu a reconciling of elements belonging to both normative masculinity and normative femininity. Matu becomes an accomplished *mundu-mugu* (magic man), which is associated with Gikuyu masculinity. Yet his identity is also constructed by his enjoyment and participation in feminine gendered activities like listening to his mother's stories and riddles, and cultivating a *shamba* of his own, so displaying 'an inborn respect for growing things'.<sup>47</sup> His brother Muthengi, the very embodiment of Gikuyu normative masculinity, scorns women's stories, and considers that 'to do girls' work, and without protest, was the sign of a weakling and a fool'.<sup>48</sup> However, Matu challenges the traditional thinking of Muthengi when he enters into the contact zone formed by the intersection of normative masculinity and femininity. In so doing, Matu demonstrates that wisdom - a desired aspect of Gikuyu normative masculinity -

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>44</sup> Wendoh, p.116.

<sup>45</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, pp.36-37.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.103.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.90.



can be acquired from listening to women's tales. Matu is thereby easily able to shame Muthengi in a test of quickness of mind and memory by answering all of Waseru's riddles correctly. Matu's occupation of the Third Space produced in the presence of different gender-related behaviours results in a hybrid identity that challenges and subverts concepts of normative behaviours of men and women. It enables him to escape the authority of the Gikuyu construction of gender difference and appear as the other of himself to the extent that he encourages his son, Karanja, to cultivate the soil with his mother 'so that you may learn to become a man'.<sup>49</sup>

Muthengi, nevertheless, does not escape being drawn into the contact zone that emerges upon the arrival of the red strangers. Their attitude to the Gikuyu and their homeland is summed up below:

"I have come in peace and not war; nor shall I take away your cattle and goats. I have come to govern the country with justice on behalf of my leader, who is a very great ruler indeed and has conquered many people besides you. I therefore say: if you will keep peace between your warriors and me, I will make you a leader in your own country and you shall help me rule. But if you resist, then I shall bring followers who kill as you saw your warriors killed, and there will be much bloodshed and suffering, and you yourself will be captured and sent far away from your own people to live alone in poverty."<sup>50</sup>

Up to this point in time, the red strangers have been geographically separated from the Gikuyu. Nevertheless, they obviously hold the opinion that it is their divine right to move into the homeland of another, and in so doing take over and govern both country and people. The intersection of alien cultures ensures that the resultant clash between European and Gikuyu is inevitable due to the difference in perspective and the arrogance of the Europeans:

"What protection do we need?" Muthengi demanded. "Is not that the daily business of my warriors? And when did we send for help from strangers?" [...] "Justice is done by the council of elders and by the council of aramati, the old men," Muthengi said. "It has always been so, and their wisdom is never in doubt. Did they not learn the law from their predecessors, who were in turn taught to govern by their fathers? What does he, a stranger, know of justice? Has he no justice in his own country, that he comes to seek ours?"<sup>51</sup>

Evidently, Muthengi is seen here grappling with the notion that the strangers can adopt such an attitude. Although he understands the concept of war and conquering on a tribal scale, Muthengi does not comprehend the scope of British imperialism. Furthermore, in questioning the behaviour of the red strangers, he draws attention to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.258.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.168.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp.169-170.

the Gikuyu system of justice already in place. Thus, the outcome of entering into the contact zone feels far from positive for Muthengi, for, although he accepts the position of chief njama to the white ruler, there is 'a feeling of hopeless entanglement [that] weighed him down. He was like a mole struggling helplessly in a trap'.<sup>52</sup>

Githae-Mugo tells us 'the African woman Huxley admires, often acting as spokesman on her behalf against what she perceives as African male oppression'.<sup>53</sup> However, taking account of Githae-Mugo's statement, Huxley's focus upon native women's society and community in *Red Strangers* is not as prominent as I would have expected. Further, when she does depict them she shows less evidence of their boundary crossings than I may have hoped to discover in a woman depicting others of the same sex. This leads me to question the type of voice she constitutes in adopting the role of speaker on behalf of Gikuyu women. Earlier in this chapter, I demonstrated that Huxley depicts some Gikuyu male characters as occupying a new Third Space in which 'old hierarchies are questioned and notions of origin, cultural power, and innate stability are displaced'.<sup>54</sup> When Gikuyu women feature, however, the impact of colonialism upon their lives is not striking, nor is there an apparent questioning of 'old hierarchies' or any displacement of seemingly natural stabilities. Instead, Huxley presents an image of womanhood that complies with the African male stereotypical view of women as 'the all-accepting creature of fecundity and self-sacrifice'.<sup>55</sup> Hence, in addition to increasing 'the wealth of her husband's clan' through childbearing,<sup>56</sup> Githae-Mugo observes:

Only the women toil to keep this world going; at least they cultivate the shambas, fetch the wood and the water, carry heavy loads whenever there is a journey to be made, do all the domestic work and literally run the essential sectors of life.<sup>57</sup>

Rather than disrupting unchallenged models of normative femininity, Huxley's construction of the native women as upholders of culture and tradition highlight the unchanging and restrained nature of traditional Gikuyu normative femininity.

Wanjeri's occupation of the traditional role of orator, however, simultaneously complies with a particular aspect of normative feminine behaviour and suggests an

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.171.

<sup>53</sup> Githae-Mugo, pp.18-19.

<sup>54</sup> Neil Campbell, *The Cultures of the American New West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 24.

<sup>55</sup> Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994), p. 58.

<sup>56</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.40.

<sup>57</sup> Githae-Mugo, p.47.



attempt to challenge natural orders and 'old hierarchies' through the transgression of gender-related boundaries. Patriarchal tradition dictates that the male Gikuyu children are interpellated and acquire wisdom from 'the company of men in the thingira'.<sup>58</sup> Yet Matu's interest is in women's stories and he subsequently shows a preference for the women's huts. Thus, Wanjeri both conforms to and subverts the role of storyteller by encouraging Matu to cross gender boundaries and listen to her stories and riddles. In this respect she exemplifies the literal meaning of various African terms for 'woman' that are rooted in traditional cultural philosophy, which are discussed in detail in chapter three. For example, *mwothomka*, the Gikuyu term for woman traditionally constructs her as an outsider and transgressor of boundaries, whilst the alternative Luganda critical discourse, *mukazi*, recognises a well-developed sense of autonomy in an African woman. Wanjeri illustrates her hybrid identity by appropriating the space and role traditionally occupied by the male elders, and locates herself within a new Third Space that merges aspects of male and female gender-related behaviours hence challenging accepted notions pertaining to the construction of women's identity.

The significance of the hearthstones traditionally used for cooking, and their interconnection with the identity of Gikuyu women is an aspect of the text that can easily be missed since Huxley refers to them only fleetingly. However, the hearthstones are both a symbol of African womanhood and of her position in society. The text informs the reader that 'a woman's hearthstones [...] are] the very core of your life'<sup>59</sup> and 'these stones, once chosen, would become so closely bound up with her existence that they could never be abandoned or exchanged'.<sup>60</sup> The stones bear the weight of food; they withstand fire and the elements and still survive; they are uncomplaining, mute. These are the reasons why the woman identifies with them. Their signification is therefore worthy of further analysis, particularly as words carry with them the missing presence of alternative meanings, which effectively enhance their interpretation. The term '-stone' connotes the alternative English language association of 'pip' or 'seed' out of which new life emerges, thus forming a parallel with the child-bearing role of women in African societies and the significance of motherhood as an aspect of a Gikuyu woman's identity. In addition, the English

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<sup>58</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.33.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.186.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.150.

language term 'stone' carries with it associations of weight or heaviness, which links to the weight that women bear in relation to the difficulties associated with nurturing and caring for her family in difficult conditions. However, 'stone' also suggests a lack of feeling and/or expression, which can be related to the oppression of native women's freedom and expression in a patriarchal society. However, hearthstones are naturally very strong and are therefore used to cook on. Therefore, whilst hearthstones convey spatial imagery linked to the traditional Gikuyu woman's domesticity and nurturing aspects of her normative identity, by extension, I interpret them as carrying the missing presence of strength, thereby forming a link with the strength of women, and so signifying a covert challenge to African male oppression.

Since the anthropological aspect of the text is a preoccupation of Huxley's it seems reasonable to take account of this characteristic when analyzing *Red Strangers*. Certainly, similarities with Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), a later text about the Igbo, are apparent in that *Red Strangers* can be regarded as an illustration of Gikuyu traditions, principles, systems, modes of speaking and methods of doing things that existed prior to the arrival of the colonisers.<sup>61</sup> Macgoye considers the text to be 'a remarkable achievement'<sup>62</sup> while G.W. Burnett declares that it 'makes the British and their imperialism appear absolutely alien, ridiculous, and even comic, were it not so tragic'.<sup>63</sup> Ezekiel Mphahlele,<sup>64</sup> and Githae-Mugo,<sup>65</sup> have also acknowledged Huxley's application of detailed anthropological knowledge. However, while crossing cultural boundaries in the attempt to strategically locate herself as an 'African' writer and represent the space of the Gikuyu, Huxley simultaneously steals the voice of others and situates herself in an in-between space because her perspective is ambivalent. Githae-Mugo, writing in *Visions of Africa*, recognises the anthropological aspect of *Red Strangers* when she states, 'Huxley has made good use of her sources and has exercised imaginative originality in integrating anthropological data with her fictional compositions'.<sup>66</sup> Because Huxley attempts to write from a Gikuyu perspective with a European audience in mind, her efforts lead her to keep a foot in each camp. Whilst she displays her knowledge acquired from an

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<sup>61</sup> Githae-Mugo also remarks upon the similarities between the two texts. See p. 49.

<sup>62</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye cited in J. Roger Kurtz, *Nyarloka's Gift: The Writing of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye* (Nairobi: Mvule Africa, 2005), p. 187.

<sup>63</sup> G.W. Burnett, 'Red Strangers', *Journal of Third World Studies*, Fall (2002), pp. 289 – 290 (p. 289).

<sup>64</sup> Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974), p.176.

<sup>65</sup> Githae-Mugo, p.45.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.45.



anthropological course at the London School of Economics and as a visitor at a Gikuyu reserve, she also provides European readers with a generous dose of drama and entertainment in keeping with the literary traditions of a work of fiction. Githae-Mugo states:

Irumu's professional consultation of the "magic beans" [...] a careful onlooker can identify as cunning guesswork. We also have the farcical situation brought about by Waseru's courting of Hiuko, Irumu's daughter, who is his son Muthengi's intended bride. Even more perverted is Huxley's story about Muthengi making love to Ambui his foster-sister, which must be among the most outrageous tales ever heard in all Gikuyu-land.<sup>67</sup>

Githae-Mugo hereby dismisses Huxley's representations as fictitious or fallacious. Huxley's artistic license merely highlights her ambivalent position and functions as a signifier of her inability to identify with and represent the Gikuyu critically. In attempting to embody the anthropological Africa, Huxley (un)consciously depicts the literary Africa where the Gikuyu continue to be perceived in terms of binary opposition to Europeans. Huxley therefore depicts Irumu as crafty rather than open and honest, and encourages the European reader to regard Waseru and Muthengi as unable to repress their sexual urges. It thus becomes apparent that the permeation of European colonial influences upon Huxley's writing are such that her border crossings related to the representation of the African 'Other' are questionable, and although still a phenomenon, are not as complex as might first be assumed.

An alternative interpretation is that Huxley's representation of Europeans in *Red Strangers* attests to her attempt to occupy two different spaces. Rather than silencing the barbaric behaviour of the white men, she writes that 'these *newcomers* had made a big camp near a place called Dagoretti and had killed several warriors who had disputed their right to draw water from a spring belonging to a certain clan'.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, when the Europeans subsequently arrive in Tetu and entice Muthengi to become chief *njama* (elder) and act on their behalf, they are overbearing, bullying and insensitive.<sup>69</sup> She is critical of the red strangers, but Huxley simultaneously depicts a lifestyle comprising aspects that many among her intended audience would regard attractive. Thus, she portrays the Europeans as living in a big house in exotic surroundings with plentiful amounts of land and an abundance of Africans to do their every bidding. Huxley writes that European settler women had a

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>68</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.153.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp.167-171.

very leisurely lifestyle, particularly as the ‘women did not cook for them [their husbands], left others to sweep and build the fire, [and] never worked in the shamba’.<sup>70</sup> In highlighting a lifestyle that a European audience could identify with, find exciting and attractive, Huxley, whilst also criticising the actions of the colonisers, locates herself within an in-between space. Nevertheless, she is attempting to write from the perspective of the Gikuyu to whom the red strangers would have appeared both barbaric and privileged. In this respect, Huxley uses *Red Strangers* to demonstrate her imagined connection with the Gikuyu, and as a tool for re-presenting that group as an imagined and interpretive community. Her success in engaging with and re-presenting this disparate community is maybe more questionable now than it was at the time of publication, however, particularly in the light of the development of colonial and postcolonial theoretical approaches to literary texts. For example, in a letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> March 1942, Perham praises *Red Strangers* as ‘an astonishing exercise of sympathy and imagination on behalf of the Africans.’<sup>71</sup> When considering Huxley’s attempt to project an alternative perspective, therefore, it seems that a specific point to bear in mind is that she lived in a different era and thus consideration ought to be given to her endeavour to project a perspective at variance to that of the dominant ideology of the period. Consequently, Austin Bukenya confirms that ‘we criticise it [*Red Strangers*] but we may be a little wise after the event.’<sup>72</sup> Although she may not wholly succeed, it should be acknowledged that Huxley does try to answer anti-white settlement critics and adopt the alternative viewpoint of the indigenous, as suggested by her mother, by stepping outside of her familiar settler position. Hence, Bukenya states that she does in fact bring an alternative view and an insight to her times.<sup>73</sup>

Huxley did not live in Africa beyond childhood and, therefore, did not experience a common suffering in the way of Macgoeye, who is an integrated member of the community about which she writes. Marcello Mollica proposes that a common suffering integrates and unites outsiders with members of alternative cultures.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.298.

<sup>71</sup> Margery Perham, ‘Invitation Accepted’, *Race and Politics in Kenya*, Elspeth Huxley and Margery Perham (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), 17-20 (p. 17).

<sup>72</sup> Austin Bukenya, unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Austin Bukenya, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Marcello Mollica, ‘The War in Lebanon: Research Under Fire’, Unpublished lecture at the University of Derby, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2006.



However, Huxley's knowledge is mainly of the settler lifestyle, with the added experience of a short visit to a Gikuyu reserve for gaining an insight into pre-colonial Gikuyu society and the impact colonisation had upon that society. Yet it is not possible to suppose that a fieldtrip to gather research materials offered Huxley the opportunity of experiencing and understanding life as a Gikuyu. She remains merely a guest with a preoccupation. Consequently, Huxley steals the voice of the indigenous people ostensibly because she believes that:

The old Kikuyu men, that rapidly dwindling number who remember life as it was lived before British rule, cannot express their point of view to us because they cannot express it in terms which we can understand. The young educated man – educated in our purely literary sense of the word – uses the thought-tracks of the European; he is scarcely more able than his European teacher to interpret the feelings and outlook of the generation to whom the processes of European thought were always alien.<sup>75</sup>

Huxley hereby justifies her own imaginary superior knowledge and ability whilst perpetuating the Eurocentric myth about the inferiority of the ability of Africans. Further, she proves that Ogundipe-Leslie's concern relating to the arrogance of outsiders who attempt to take over a culture and write from that perspective is not unfounded.<sup>76</sup> Because she is not an integrated member of that culture, in representing the Gikuyu Huxley is guilty of projecting her Eurocentric opinions onto that society. Whilst she may intend to illustrate the indigenous perspective in *Red Strangers*, it is apparent that in attempting to step into the shoes of another, her success is limited because she writes about Africa like a European. Hence, whilst striving to write from an African perspective, Huxley's (un)conscious voyages into the European diaspora in Africa indicate slippage and examples of a Eurocentric perspective that validates Robert J.C. Young's claim that 'the interval between ourselves and the past may be much less than we assume. We may be more bound up with its categories than we like to think.'<sup>77</sup> Consequently, although I have illustrated that Huxley's border crossing are a recognisable phenomena in *Red Strangers*, her success is limited because they are not as complex as her life experience would initially seem to suggest. By constantly reinforcing racial differences in *Red Strangers* Huxley indicates that the space she occupies is not as absolute as she herself may wish to project, hence my initial defining of her as occupying an in-between space.

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<sup>75</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.xvi.

<sup>76</sup> Molar Ogundipe-Leslie, 'Black...Issues in Culture, Narrative and Representation', Unpublished Lecture at the University of Derby, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

<sup>77</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995; repr. 2002), p. 28.

## Space and the African Woman Writer

In *The Promised Land* (1966), the notion of the particular space occupied by the Luo woman is raised when the narrator states: 'Once a woman was married she swore to stay with her husband's people for better or for worse, and no one would have her back at home.'<sup>78</sup> Speaking in an interview with Mike Kuria about gender-related spaces and Luo normative femininity, Ogot says:

When you are born your destiny is marriage. When you die your burial place is at your husband's place. And that is why for a Luo girl marriage was and is still so important and will remain important. Because you have no burial place at your birthplace.<sup>79</sup>

The position assigned to a Luo wife by traditional culture, as indicated by quotations such as these, is necessarily within a Third Space because she has to travel and cross borders to create and appropriate her traditionally assigned space. Nyapol in *The Promised Land* further highlights the location of the Luo wife:

Nyapol raised her head and listened. She thought she heard someone coming. But it was the wind whistling shrilly above the trees like a human being. Nyapol suddenly felt frightened and lonely. Her two bridesmaids, who had stayed with her for the first few weeks, had just left. Before her marriage Nyapol had never felt loneliness. Her father had many wives and she had many step-sisters. They had all slept in their grandmother's hut and talked and laughed together well into the night.

But, in this last week, loneliness had begun to creep in. How could she exist in this isolated village? [...]

As Nyapol thought of her two bridesmaids who had returned to their home in Myahera that morning, tears came to her eyes.<sup>80</sup>

It is apparent from the passage that Nyapol feels alienated and displaced like a stranger. The Luo wife occupies a different space to Luo men. She is perceived as a visitor since she crosses clan, and in Nyapol's case, geographical boundaries to occupy her constructed space at her husband's home and amidst her husband's people. The connotation is that the Luo wife as traveller, or visitor, enters into and embraces other clans than her own in the contact zone of the borderlands:

Brought up in Asembo and married to a Luo from Gem Location, this is the situation of Ogot herself and of which she speaks in relation to her political career. She states, 'As a single girl I will not stand in Asembo, that is where my brother Bob stood. I stand in Gem because that is where I am a mother. I have a cultural right to

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<sup>78</sup> Grace Ogot, *The Promised Land* (Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam: East African Educational Publishers, 1966; repr. 2002), p. 11.

<sup>79</sup> Grace Ogot, *Talking Gender: Conversations with Kenyan Women Writers*, ed. by Mike Kuria (Nairobi: Peepal Tree Press, 2003), 71 – 97, p. 75.

<sup>80</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, pp.1-2.



stand there.’<sup>81</sup> By contrast, traditional Luo culture constructs the male space at the place of his birth, but tradition forces Ogot to travel and cross boundaries to occupy her Third Space as a wife, mother and politician in Gem. Nevertheless, Ogot confirms that Kenyan women ‘who are going into politics are carrying a very big burden because actually they have broken from the norm’: a break that transgresses gender boundaries and encroaches upon a space that is traditionally male.<sup>82</sup> Ogot’s position as a female politician in Kenya also situates her in the contact zone(s) created when a woman occupies a position in a predominantly male-oriented world, the like of which she represents in *The Graduate* (1980). The protagonist, the Honorable Mrs Juanina Karungaru, illustrates that the contact zone operates on more than one level and does not merely refer to the space produced by a woman’s encroachment into the male arena of politics. Hence for Juanina, ‘the possibility of her being too busy to attend to the needs of her family [...] would need careful handling. The careful handling that her sensitive husband Ileri needed right away.’<sup>83</sup> Likewise, with regard to her own position as a politician Ogot states:

the Luo woman politician must also remember her status in marriage [...]. In her political life she is carrying a husband with her. [...] I must take care that my activism will not demean or hinder his progress or hinder his status in society or hinder the status of my father-in-law and my mother-in-law in society.<sup>84</sup>

Clearly the contact zone occupied by both Ogot and her character, the Honorable Mrs Juanina Karungaru, incorporates the clash between the role of politician and the duties of a normative Luo wife and mother, and the subsequent juggling that results.

However, notwithstanding all of the above, from early childhood it would seem that the context of Ogot’s life ensured her future hybridization and occupation of the Third Space on a different level to those already mentioned. Ogot grew up with the Christian Bible stories narrated by her father juxtaposed with the traditional Luo myths and stories told by her grandmother, which she credits as influencing her writing. She states ‘my interest in writing fiction may have started at a very early age, stimulated by my childhood keenness to listen to my grandmother’s folktales.’<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, Ogot, who is a Christian, also admits she was ‘so inspired’ when she

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<sup>81</sup> Ogot, *Talking Gender*, p. 94.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>83</sup> Grace Ogot, *The Graduate* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1980), p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Grace Ogot in *Talking Gender*, 71 – 97, p. 93.

<sup>85</sup> Grace Ogot and Bernth Lindfors, ‘Interview with Grace Ogot’, *World Literature Written in English*, 18 (1979), 56 – 68 (p. 57). Also in Lindfors, Bernth, (ed) *Mazungumzo: Interviews with East African Writers, Publishers, Editors and Scholars* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1980), pp. 123 – 133.

read the Old Testament.<sup>86</sup> Unlike Huxley, who seems unable to marry aspects of two disparate cultures and herself enter into the Third Space, Ogot merges her Christian belief with aspects of traditional Luo ideology. Thus, in her writing it is apparent that she merges Luo and Christian beliefs, in so doing embodying Macgoye's notion of taking 'from custom what suited you'<sup>87</sup>, and asserts that the 'church can do certain things and the medicine man can do other things. In such a situation you can't say "This is traditional, and this is modern" because it is all blended into one life.'<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, Ogot's training as a nurse positions her in the contact zone created when modern medical science and practice clashes with the traditional African medicine man. Ogot affirms 'I started to take an interest not only in traditional African life but also in my experiences as a nursing sister in modern hospitals both in Africa and London. These were fertile areas to stimulate the mind.'<sup>89</sup> In this instance, then, Ogot willingly enters into the contact zone of traditional and modern because it is representative of a creative Third Space for her. Consequently, part of my analysis of *The Promised Land* seeks out evidence of the merging of traditional Luo culture with both Christianity and modern medicine in order to interrogate the notion of hybridization as it manifests itself within the text.

Kuria states that 'Grace Ogot is undoubtedly one of the most prolific Kenyan women writers and one who, to use Oludhe's words [...], has stood the test of time.'<sup>90</sup> Yet ironically she has been largely ignored by literary and feminist critics, as has been noted by both Florence Stratton and Gloria Chukukere.<sup>91</sup> Criticism of *The Promised Land* has tended to be derogatory and disappointing when coming from males. David Cook refers to it as 'naïve and bizarre', Charles R. Larson defines it as 'one of the most disappointing African novels in a long time', and Gerald Moore recommends that Ogot should restrict her 'essentially fantastic imagination' to the short story form.<sup>92</sup> By contrast, Marion Kilson raises the issue of Ogot's over dependence upon

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>87</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Coming to Birth* (London: Virago, 1986), p. 65.

<sup>88</sup> Grace Ogot and Bernth Lindfors, 'Interview with Grace Ogot', 56 – 68 (pp. 60 – 61).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>90</sup> Mike Kuria, ed., *Talking Gender: Conversations with Kenyan Women Writers* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2003), p. 71.

<sup>91</sup> Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 59, & Gloria Chukukere, *Gender Voices and Choices: Redefining Women in Contemporary African Fiction* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1995), p. 217.

<sup>92</sup> David Cook, 'Annual Bibliography of Commonwealth Literature: East and Central Africa', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 6 (January, 1969), p. 9, Charles R. Larson, 'A Review of *The Promised*



personal experience, whilst Stratton and Chukukere adopt a feminist approach. Stratton analyses Ogot's privileging of the female voice and subsequent undermining of patriarchal ideology,<sup>93</sup> and Chukukere concentrates on Ogot's apparently non-militant Luo female characters to draw the conclusion that hers is 'a passive response to the current cry for female autonomy'.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, little attention has been given to Ogot's merging of traditional Luo with modern culture, although Maryse Condé remarks that, though her African characters 'are Christian, they remain strongly attached to their traditional customs.'<sup>95</sup>

### Spatial Relations: Juxtaposing Biblical Imagery with Traditional Luo Beliefs

The Biblical stories about the Promised Land are shot through with the imagery and symbolism of what can be interpreted as a human quest for security, for 'home'. Hence Ogot's title *The Promised Land* is immediately recognisable as privileging and carrying with it Biblical connotations of a land where God's faithful people live in blessing and peace. Within the text, her vivid imagery rapidly raises questions pertaining to the Luo male protagonist, Ochola's, religious status and opinions. It is notable that he is portrayed as having knowledge of Christian beliefs and teachings when he compares his homeland Seme unfavourably to Canaan. Focalizing through Ochola Ogot writes:

Why had God been sleeping for so long? When He created this land, He must have had a better purpose for it. He must have said that this land, like the land of Canaan, would flow with milk and honey so that its inhabitants could have plenty to eat and drink and live a better life. Yet Seme was no Canaan, and there was no hope that the land would ever be fertile like the cows whose udders are full of milk even during the dry season.<sup>96</sup>

It soon becomes apparent that Ochola's all consuming preoccupation is his quest to reside in a utopian Promised Land of his own. When he finally reaches Tanganyika the narrator states:

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*Land*, *Africa Report* 12 (1967), p. 44, and Gerald Moore cited by Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 60.

<sup>93</sup> Stratton, p.67 & p.62.

<sup>94</sup> Gloria Chukukere, *Gender Voices and Choices: Redefining Women in Contemporary African Fiction* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1995), p.220 & p.264.

<sup>95</sup> Maryse Condé, 'Three Female Writers in Modern Africa: Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo and Grace Ogot', *Présence Africaine*, 2:82 (1972), 132 – 143 (p. 140).

<sup>96</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p8.

He recalled a sermon that a toothless old church leader had once preached at Sunday school; how God led the children of Israel to the land of plenty, the land of manna and honey. To Ochola, Tanganyika was the 'Promised Land'.<sup>97</sup>

Yet the Biblical imagery and Ochola's religious allegiance is juxtaposed with, and shown to simultaneously exist alongside aspects of traditional Luo beliefs. Ochola is fully aware that he is going against Luo tradition in leaving his birthplace to travel to the place he hopes will prove to be his personal Promised Land. Yet conversely, and in keeping with the Luo tradition, he 'lifted his eyes to heaven to communicate with the spirit of his mother' in an attempt to secure her blessing.<sup>98</sup> Of Ochola's mother, Chukukere states that 'she symbolizes ancestral blessing and is often called upon to guide and protect the family'.<sup>99</sup> Hence, Ogot depicts Ochola here as holding on to his cultural roots. Yet because he has entered the Third Space that exists amidst traditional Luo and Christian belief, he also raises his eyes to *heaven*: a plane of existence that is specifically associated with Christian belief.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, his traditional culture is shown in the placing of a grass ring with a stone on top over the area of land he lays claim to in Musoma.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, Ogot emphasises Ochola's traditional culture when he adheres to the Luo custom that requires him to take 'a cock and a piece of live fire' with him when he builds his new home,<sup>102</sup> and when he spends the first night alone there with only the white cock for company.<sup>103</sup> Heidi Holland writes that for Africans 'being a Christian or subscribing to other religions in no way conflicts with traditional beliefs' and that 'God is not a being but an invisible power in Africa, whereas ancestor spirits continue to exist near their descendants'.<sup>104</sup> This notion is underlined in the text when Ochola asks:

"What makes you think that people must abandon their traditions when they go to a foreign land? Don't you know that our ancestors' eyes follow us everywhere? If you break the law today, or tomorrow, their eyes can see you. A month may pass, even a full year, but in the end you're [sic] be punished because you've gone against the taboos of the tribe".<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.44. N.B. Tanganyika is modern day Tanzania.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>99</sup> Chukukere, p.254.

<sup>100</sup> In an unpublished interview that took place on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2008, Austin Bukenya confirmed to Elizabeth F. Oldfield that traditional Luo thought does not acknowledge the notion of heaven.

<sup>101</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p.49.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>104</sup> Heidi Holland, *African Magic: Traditional Ideas that Heal a Continent* (London: Viking, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>105</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p.54.



Ochola's religious hybridity is therefore transgressive and subversive because it challenges and displaces the authority of dominant ideologies. However, it also creates ambivalence because it can be regarded as emancipatory in its creation of a new identity that is similar yet different to the old ones: similar because he believes in aspects of traditional Luo ideas; different because of his Christian beliefs. Thus, it can be interpreted that Ogot's suggestion is allied to an erasing of notions relating to ethnicity and cultural ties and a move towards what Stuart Hall refers to as 'new ethnicities' that are 'predicated on difference and diversity'.<sup>106</sup>

### **Ochola the Settler/Wanderer: Problematizing Space in his Promised Land**

Biblical notions relating to the Promised Land are paradoxical. In addition to the image of paradise that the expression projects, there is also a connection with wilderness, wandering, and being lost, which extends to include feelings of alienation, confusion, and chaos. The crossing over of Ochola to Musoma in neighbouring Tanganyika to become a settler simultaneously exemplifies the paradoxical Biblical meanings of the Promised Land, and highlights the consequence of transgressing traditional cultural boundaries. Although Ochola is successful and becomes a wealthy man, thereby proving that Musoma is a land of milk and honey, he also demonstrates that the 'promised land' is a place of chaos and confusion. Ultimately, he has to sacrifice his material wealth and return to his birthplace in Seme in order to overpower the Nyamwezi medicine man's magic and sustain his newly regained health. Thus, some critics such as Kathleen Flanagan and Chukukere have engaged with the didactic element of this text, but this is not an aspect I wish to further in my work.<sup>107</sup> The paradoxical association that wandering forms with the notion of the Promised Land, however, is important to note with regard to the type of space Ochola occupies therein, particularly as it is one that has so far escaped development.

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<sup>106</sup> Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley and Kuan-hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 447.

<sup>107</sup> Kathleen Flanagan states that, '*The Promised Land*, is [...] a cautionary folk tale in its warning against the loss of traditional African social mores and customs' in 'African Folk Tales as Disruptions of narrative in the Works of Grace Ogot and Elspeth Huxley', *Women's Studies*, 25:4 (June 1996) 371 – 385. *Academic ASAP*. Thomson Gale. University of Derby. 06 February 2006. Similarly, Gloria Chukukere states, 'although Ochola solicits for ancestral blessing through ritual sacrifices to his mother, her spirit is shown to clearly disapprove of his move and in this regard becomes synonymous with the larger collective will that Ochola ignores' in *Gender Voices and Choices: Redefining Women in Contemporary African Fiction* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1995), p. 254.

Stratton has highlighted Ochola's 'Luo migration as a form of colonization analogous to the British form in its underlying ideology and in the consequences it has for the people indigenous to the place of settlement'.<sup>108</sup> The implication is that Ochola the settler occupies indigenous Tanganyika land and in so doing attempts to impose the Luo way of doing things upon the native inhabitants of his own personal 'promised land'. Mahmood Mamdani argues that natives who move away from their home area or relocate to a different cultural region are settlers.<sup>109</sup> Thus, in relation to Mamdani's view regarding the native and the settler it is the notion of the space Ochola occupies as settler, which in turn is conceptually linked to wandering that I am concerned to examine. Mamdani confirms that the Kiswahili term, *mzungu*, is generally used to refer to a white settler/foreigner, but that 'it simply means a restless person, a person who will not stay in one place' - a wanderer.<sup>110</sup> Whilst he resides in his birthplace of Seme, Ochola is a native occupying an ethnic space, signifying that his identity is defined by the ancestral area/space to which he belongs. Consequently, Luo custom delineates Ochola's rights and responsibilities, particularly in relation to his access to land. Therefore an old man asks Ochola: "But what drives you away from here? You've enough land at the moment, and when your father sleeps, being the first son, you'll inherit all his as well".<sup>111</sup> However, when Ochola migrates to Musoma he crosses over into a different space to become a settler, which impacts upon the construction of his identity. Mamdani argues:

every native outside of his or her own home area was a settler of sorts, someone considered non-indigenous – precisely because that person had an ethnic home, even if within the same country. [...] Every ethnic area made the distinction between those who belonged and those who didn't, between ethnic citizens and ethnic strangers.<sup>112</sup>

Ochola is a native African citizen but is non-indigenous to the Musoma area. Thus, as a settler in Tanganyika he is regarded as a native settler. Consequently, he is still perceived as a stranger by the natives; a fact that Ochola admits subconsciously, as the dream about his neighbour, the Nyamwezi medicine man, heckling him illustrates:

"You Luo people, you Luo people,  
What kind of people are you?  
I hate all of you.

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<sup>108</sup> Stratton, pp.70-71.

<sup>109</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, 'When Does the Settler Become a Native? Reflections of the Colonial Roots of Citizenship in Equatorial and South Africa', (13 May 1998), [http://www.bard.edu/hrp/resource\\_pdfs/mamdani.settler.pdf](http://www.bard.edu/hrp/resource_pdfs/mamdani.settler.pdf) [accessed 19 February 2007].

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>111</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p.18.

<sup>112</sup> Mamdani, p.3.



You cheat yourselves that you were born to rule others.

[...]

Return to your land all of you!"<sup>113</sup>

Ochola no longer occupies an ethnic space because as a settler in Musoma his identity revolves around the construction of him as *mzungu*. As a result, his settler identity forges an inextricable link with the idea of stranger/foreigner and the associated notion of his border crossing of cultural lines, which in turn invokes the concept of the frontier and the consequent entrance into the contact zone. In the context of the space that Ochola the settler occupies, however, my attention does not centre upon the frontier in the sense of a geographical space; rather I adopt Noreen Groover Lape's view of 'frontiers as places where cultures make contact'.<sup>114</sup> I therefore regard Ochola's personal frontier as a human cultural space where Luo and Nyamwezi meet.

Ochola's human spatial frontier where 'cultures make contact' occurs at the point when he encounters his neighbour for the first time. His claim of the so-called 'virgin land'<sup>115</sup> and the subsequent building and habitation of his compound occurs a considerable period of time prior to his initial meeting with his Nyamwezi neighbour. Upon taking 'a wrong turning'<sup>116</sup> on the way home one day, however, Ochola decides that it may be advantageous to make his neighbour's acquaintance. When he enters the Nyamwezi medicine man's compound, the following encounter takes place:

"I'm sorry I've entered your home," stammered Ochola. "But I happened to be passing here and I..."

"There's nothing to be sorry about," the old man answered, cutting him short. "You're another Luo, aren't you? And you've come to settle like the rest of them? But who put it into your head that this is no man's land, for all Luo people to come and settle as they please. You come like masters to rob us of our land. You want us to work for you, but you don't want your children to work for us. You appoint yourselves chiefs and oppress those who have no quarrel with you."<sup>117</sup>

Ochola's entrance into the human spatial frontier where Luo and Nyamwezi cultures meet, position him in the contact zone with the Nyamwezi medicine man. Conflict between the native Nyamwezi medicine man and Ochola the Luo settler occurs because both parties hold a pre-formed attitude with regard to the other. Influenced by previous experience, the medicine man's pre-formed attitude to all Luo settlers is

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<sup>113</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p.85.

<sup>114</sup> Noreen Groover Lape, *West of the Border: The Multicultural Literature of the Western American Frontiers* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>115</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p.48.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p.61.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.63.

one of jealousy and hostility<sup>118</sup> because they ‘come like masters to rob’ the natives of their land.<sup>119</sup> Ochola’s reasons for entering into the settler space are ultimately motivated by the prospect of material gain in a country where his attitude is one of settler superiority because he thinks he can settle as he pleases and that ‘wide expanses of the land were virgin territory’ just waiting for Luo settlers to come and cultivate them.<sup>120</sup> Consequently, although Ochola enters a religious Third Space he fails to enter a cultural Third Space when he occupies the settler space because he regards it as a no man’s land there for the taking and ruling of. Thus, his preoccupation is not with his own personal integration into indigenous Musoma society. Rather, Ochola establishes and maintains strong links with the Luo to ensure that he embeds himself within the settler community in Musoma. Likewise, neither is the medicine man prepared to cross cultural boundaries, instead warning Ochola to ‘keep out of my way’.<sup>121</sup> Hence, when they both enter the contact zone where ‘subjects previously separated by geographic and historic disjunctures’ meet, whilst they clash and grapple with each other, neither of them are able to progress further and enter a Third Space where two cultures merge to form new identities as a result of the contact between cultures.<sup>122</sup>

In her article ‘Notes on Magical Practices in Zanzibar and Pemba: The Role of the *Waganda* during Colonial Times’ (2006), Beatrice Nicolini confirms that ‘throughout colonial period [sic], witchcraft featured in racist and imperialist constructions of alterity and inferiority as projected onto members of East African societies.’<sup>123</sup> Although Huxley ostensibly writes from the African perspective in *Red Strangers*, an example of such representations can be seen in her portrayal of the *mundu-mugu* (magic-man), as highlighted earlier. By contrast, in *The Promised Land*, Ogot privileges traditional witchcraft practices and the medicine man by depicting both as a normative part of conventional Luo/African thinking. Furthermore, she traverses cultural borders in an endeavour to show how these traditions exist alongside Christian beliefs and modern medicine.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.75.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p.63.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.63.

<sup>122</sup> Pratt, p.7.

<sup>123</sup> Beatrice Nicolini, ‘Notes on Magical Practices in Zanzibar and Pemba: The Role of the *Waganda* during Colonial Times’, *Studies in Witchcraft, Magic, War and Peace in Africa: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. by Beatrice Nicolini (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 115 – 126 (p. 116).



Historically the Nyamwezi settled in Tanzania during the fifteenth century and, despite attempts over the years to convert them to Christianity and Islam there has been a general tendency to abide by traditional beliefs. Spirits are an important aspect of traditional Nyamwezi culture and witchdoctors and witchcraft are deemed to be a particularly powerful aspect of this society. Therefore, when Ogot introduces the Nyamwezi medicine man, not only does she form an immediate and virtual link with spirits and witchcraft, but also demonstrates that witchcraft operates as a traditional method of achieving power and status in African communities. Traditionally, a witch doctor or medicine man is visited to find a remedy for either a physical or mental ailment, but they are both feared and revered because their ability to command the spirits results in a power that is capable of performing 'bad medicine'.<sup>124</sup> Prompted by the death of his black medicine-cat, this is how the actions of the Nyamwezi medicine man in *The Promised Land* can be interpreted:

The old man wept as he wrapped the dead cat in a goat's skin. Thoughts raced round his head. Should he burst into Ochola's home and challenge him to an open fight? No! He decided against that. He knew the answer Ochola would give him and he was not going to let him get away with it. He took out a piece of bamboo from his pocket and emptied the contents of the hollow stem into the pit. He covered it carelessly and then walked back slowly to his home. After sunset, he returned to Ochola's village. It was dark and nobody could see him. Ochola was playing with the children and Nyapol was busy cooking dinner. When the old man started to plant medicine all round the fence, neither Ochola nor his wife heard him.<sup>125</sup>

Nicolini affirms that this dark side of witchcraft involves the medicine man 'cast[ing] a spell to extract revenge or to send bad fortune in order to seek repayment for cheating or to placate a jealousy'.<sup>126</sup> Although Ochola maintains certain Christian beliefs, when he awakes after his dream about the medicine man and takes a modern remedy in the form of quinine to cure the illness that has suddenly beset him, it is in the knowledge that he has been cursed, as highlighted by his shouting: "Old man, old man, why are you killing me? Why are you after my life?"<sup>127</sup> However, Ogot has said:

In day-to-day life in some communities in Kenya, both the modern and the traditional cures coexist. [...] Western education should only add new ideas to old, blending with what makes a man what he is. A person's background is extremely important.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p.118.

<sup>125</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p.84.

<sup>126</sup> Nicolini, p.118.

<sup>127</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p.86.

<sup>128</sup> Grace Ogot and Bernth Lindfors, 'Interview with Grace Ogot', 56 – 68 (p. 62).

In *The Promised Land*, when modern medicine fails to bring about a cure the reader witnesses a falling back upon traditional ways in the form of another medicine man to find a remedy. However, in order to recover, Magungu, Ochola's medicine man warns "I can't treat your husband unless you believe in me".<sup>129</sup> Ultimately, Ochola's brother, Abiero, and Nyapol his wife, subject him to both traditional and modern medicine in an effort to bring about a cure. In so doing they demonstrate their own particular occupation of the Third Space wherein the interplay of the opposing ideologies of traditional and modern medicine are borne out.

### **Evidencing Hybridity in the Text of the Hybrid Writer**

The details of my career as a writer and my age, unless I were a 90-year-old genius, have no bearing on the situation.<sup>130</sup>

Kimenye differs from Huxley and Ogot in that she is both culturally and racially hybrid. Whilst the texts of Huxley, Ogot, Kimenye and Macgoye bear witness to spatial relations and cultural diversity, Kimenye's life experience has a significant bearing on the innovative space occupied by her.

Among the first Anglophone Ugandan women writers to be published in East Africa,<sup>131</sup> Kimenye is widely regarded as 'the leading writer of Children's literature in Uganda'.<sup>132</sup> She was born of mixed parentage in Yorkshire, England and aspects of her unavoidable exposure to European influences during her formative years include her convent school education in Yorkshire and training as a nurse in Hammersmith,

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<sup>129</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p.100.

<sup>130</sup> Barbara Kimenye in Janheinz Jahn, Ulla Schild, and Almut Nordmann, *Who's Who in African Literature: Biographies, Work, Commentaries* (Tübingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1972), p. 176.

<sup>131</sup> Kimenye is commonly regarded and defined as Ugandan. See Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe, 'Barbara Kimenye: Profile 1', *Contemporary Africa Database*

<http://people.africadatabase.org/en/profile/15933.html> [accessed 1 December 2005], J. Bardolph,

'Kimenye, Barbara', *Literature Online*

<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=R0079093&divLevel=0&queryId=...> [accessed 6

December 2005], Donald E. Herdeck, *African Authors: A Companion to Black African Writing Volume 1: 1800-1973* (Washington, D.C.: Black Orpheus, 1973), Barbara Fister, *Third World Women's Literatures: A Dictionary and Guide to Materials in English* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood, 1995), Mabel D. Segun, 'Barbara Kimenye', *Twentieth Century Children's Writers*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, ed. by Tracy Chevalier (London: St James Press, 1989) and Janheinz Jahn, Ulla Schild & Almut Nordmann, eds., *Who's Who in African Literature: Biographies, Work, Commentaries* (Tubingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1972).

<sup>132</sup> Abasi Kiyimba, 'Cultural Dialogue and the Language of the Neighbour's Child: Lessons from Barbara Kimenye's Writing', *No Child is an Island: The Case for Children's Literature in Translation* ed. by Pat Pinsent (Lichfield, Staffordshire: Pied Piper, 2006), pp. 239 – 252, p. 239.



London.<sup>133</sup> After marrying her Tanzanian husband, Kimenye moved to Uganda in the early 1950s, becoming private secretary to the Kabaka, Edward Frederick Mutesa II, the King of Buganda. She (un)consciously appropriates African and European influences and thereby crosses cultural and identity borders. In so doing, her transgression transmits to, and is borne out in her two short story collections, *Kalasanda* (1965) and *Kalasanda Revisited* (1966).

Kimenye is unconscious of the significance of her traversing of cultural boundaries, her subsequent cultural hybridization, and its corresponding influence over the creation of her identity. She comments that she is unaware of European influences impacting either positively or negatively upon her, saying 'I'm not aware of it so I can't answer that question.'<sup>134</sup> Rather, Kimenye's perception of herself is Ugandan, and African readers and critics relate to her as such.<sup>135</sup> Kimenye states:

And the wonderful thing about living in Buganda is – at that time anyway – it was heaven for eccentrics. I never met a more individual crowd of people. And you could be as odd as you like and nobody really looked askance. The attitude is, 'oh that's just the way he or she is', you know – wonderful place for a writer.<sup>136</sup>

Kimenye's statement suggests that her adult experiences in Uganda combined with the impact of her father's African identity permits her freedom to construct an African identity, which she feels to be Ugandan by birth.<sup>137</sup> The very context of her life, constructed by a combination of European and African influences, contributes to a hybridized identity. Neil Campbell argues that 'hybridity is a space of contacts, where other positions emerge, new concepts generate from the crossing over between existing histories, but all the various elements, discourses, or traces remain within the emergent forms'.<sup>138</sup> This is the position that Kimenye occupies and she demonstrates it in her writing. However, critics like F.B. Welbourn fail to identify her new emergent position, instead scathingly dismissing her as being in possession of a 'very kizungu [European] imagination'.<sup>139</sup> Welbourn's perspective is influenced by an inability to acknowledge a new emergent form of writing that draws on both African and European influences. His approach is allied to an outmoded uncompromising

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<sup>133</sup> Barbara Kimenye, unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye, 6 July 2006, and Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 'Barbara Kimenye' *The Literary Encyclopedia* [http://www.litencyc.com/php/prINTER\\_format\\_people.php?UID=2501](http://www.litencyc.com/php/prINTER_format_people.php?UID=2501)

<sup>134</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.

<sup>135</sup> See footnotes 129 & 130.

<sup>136</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Campbell, p.25.

<sup>139</sup> F.B. Welbourn, 'Buganda Corrections', *Transition*, 25 (1966), pp. 7-8, p. 8.

binary way of thinking where the world is divided into white and black, European and African, them and us. In respect of the positive value of cultural hybridity and diversity, and its emergence within the text, Kimenye's *kizungu* imagination is nevertheless particularly significant. Due to the circumstances of her birth, Kimenye is already socially constructed as racially hybrid, thus perceived as foreign in Britain and immediately defined as *mzungu* (foreigner) in the eyes of both European and African supporters of the notion of a biologically rooted conception of race. Nevertheless, in this instance, Kimenye's *mzungu* identity is fundamental to the new type of dialogue she opens between African and European influences, and which emerge from her personal crossing over between the two cultures and ensuing occupation of a Third Space.

Consciously adopting an African perspective, *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited* offer a social commentary on African village life and a sector of African society that is generally unacknowledged and whose 'ordinary'<sup>140</sup> voices are silenced by the dominant ideology. The use of characters that are 'the backbone of the country',<sup>141</sup> therefore, 'makes us see and feel how such apparently dull lives existing in little backwaters of society and ignored by the world are actually full of interest.'<sup>142</sup> For instance, there is the 'almost blind and very lame' Salongo who, as the self-appointed 'custodian of the Ssabalangira's tomb' spends his days industriously cleaning the *Ssabalangira*'s weapons;<sup>143</sup> the oft absent Reverend Musoke who never fails to offer travellers 'a bed for the night'<sup>144</sup> and whose Christian charity leads him to adopt orphans on a regular basis; and the elderly Kibuka who 'loved to pose as the local cynic and man of the world', who famously dyed his hair in an attempt to disguise his age and so remain in his position at the *Ggombolola* Headquarters after his retirement age.<sup>145</sup> Significantly though, arguably more interesting and entertaining characters are those of Maria, Antoni and Nantondo.

Maria, the owner of the Happy Bar, is 'by far the most seductive woman in the village'.<sup>146</sup> Her charms present a constant worry to the other village women because

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<sup>140</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *Kalasanda* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 7.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>142</sup> Peter Nazareth, *An African View of Literature* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 171.

<sup>143</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda*, p.37. The title of *Ssabalangira* is given to the person appointed head of the royal clan – the position is not hereditary.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.11. *Ggombolola* Headquarters refers to the Sub-County Headquarters.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.2.



‘a simple shake of her magnificent hips is enough to bowl a man over’<sup>147</sup> as proven by her ‘numerous progeny’ by different mates.<sup>148</sup> However, whilst the village women do not condone Maria’s overt sexuality, they neither cast her out because of her inability to climb to the high moral ground inhabited particularly by the members of the Mothers’ Union. In contrast to Thiong’o’s character, Wanja, a prostitute in *Petals of Blood* (1977), who is cast out of her village when she becomes pregnant, Maria is integrated into the village society of which she is a part, despite her transgression of the boundaries of normative feminine behaviour. Ogundipe-Leslie states ‘the African male fears the attainment of equal sexual freedom and promiscuity’.<sup>149</sup> Hence, Thiong’o negates any attempt at the attainment of autonomy for Wanja when he depicts images of the prostitute as independent yet still degraded and stigmatized.<sup>150</sup> Kimenye, however, offers a different approach. She portrays Maria as an extremely sexualised character. In the case of Antoni, her favours are exchanged for ‘a gift of jewellery, soap, scent or anything else which had caught her eye’,<sup>151</sup> but she is motivated purely by her perceptive recognition that acceptance of Antoni’s gifts boosts his male ego since it enables him to gain stature in Kalasanda by showing off his wealth. Consequently, the image is not of a prostitute in the sense of the female body’s exploitation by the male, but instead is a vision of a woman who enjoys and makes use of her body in the pursuit of her own independence. Maria is famous for her ‘sumptuous curves [that] shake in perpetual merriment’,<sup>152</sup> her ‘rippling walk’, and ‘high-spirited chatter and voluptuous giggling [...] now so automatic that its effect on others was quite over-looked by her’.<sup>153</sup> As an African woman, Maria’s close association with alcohol and her way of carrying and representing herself is no doubt antagonising to the ever-respectable Mothers’ Union cohort. Not wishing to acknowledge Maria as a seductive, sexy woman, they try to impose their Europeanised values, and so ‘spitefully whisper that this unfailing charm is all something to do with what Maria puts in the drinks’.<sup>154</sup> In presenting a sensual, voluptuous woman with strong sexual appeal and the loose morals to match a lusty sexual

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>148</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 62.

<sup>149</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves*, p.35.

<sup>150</sup> Bonnie Roos, ‘Re-Historicizing the Conflicted Figure of Woman in Ngũgĩ’s *Petals of Blood*’, *Research in African Literatures*, 35:4 (Summer 2002) pp. 154-170, (p. 162).

<sup>151</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*, pp.63-64.

<sup>152</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda*, p.2.

<sup>153</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*, p.60 & p.57.

<sup>154</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda*, p.2.

appetite, Kimenye crosses boundaries relating to the African woman's identity and the associated perception of the construction of what is acceptable and decent feminine behaviour. Oozing sexuality with every movement, Maria's flirtatious banter and attitude to life in general is a fundamental part of her identity. This she demonstrates to Daudi whilst he attempts to put her accounts in order: "The secret of life is to know your assets," Daudi kept repeating but frowned when he noticed this remark only caused Maria to glance appraisingly over her own luscious bulk'.<sup>155</sup> Maria uses her body as a means of achieving independence and control over her life and she 'cared not at all' that her individual approach to life often offends others.<sup>156</sup> She therefore approaches the male species as breeding material, rather than seeking to find a single mate for life, which makes her the most powerful woman in the village. Consequently, the space Maria occupies can be perceived in terms of Antoni's *muzaana* (concubine) and necessarily differs from that of *mukyala* (lady) or *omukyala* (wife and/or lady). *Mukyala* or *omukyala* is the type of space occupied by such as Mrs. Lutaya, wife of a Civil Servant, President of the Mothers' Union, and one of 'the more sophisticated elements of Kalasanda'.<sup>157</sup> Through the characterisation of Maria, Kimenye presents the reader with *mukazi* (woman), which is perceived as a critical discourse in Buganda.<sup>158</sup> *Mukazi* is generally regarded as insulting to use in relation to the African woman due to the implication of single-mindedness derived from the allusion of oneness regarded as transgressive. However, as Maria exemplifies, it simultaneously points to an autonomous African woman negotiating and inhabiting a contact zone, and so creating and occupying her own innovative space, or *ekyaanya*, and crossing boundaries to do so.<sup>159</sup>

Maria's male counterpart is to be found in the character of Antoni Sebulibwa. What that particular person is to the male population of Kalasanda, Antoni is to the female population. Thus Antoni is Kalasanda's answer to Casanova, and as sensual and voluptuous as Maria is, Antoni is similarly blessed since 'he was a very presentable young man, thickset, muscular, and with a very engaging smile'.<sup>160</sup> Fully aware of the sexual attraction he exudes and its effect on the opposite sex, Antoni's

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>156</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*, p.64.

<sup>157</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda*, p.6.

<sup>158</sup> The concepts of *mukyala* and *mukazi* are discussed in full in Chapter 3.

<sup>159</sup> *Ekyaanya* (Luganda) relates to the concept of having one's own space, as opposed to *bbanga* (Luganda) – concept of space: notion of outer space; an interval between points; an interval of time etc.

<sup>160</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*, p.56.



‘undue interest in the ladies’ ensures that he ‘wrapped up each sale with flirtation and banter, and [...] sent many a respectable housewife home feeling pleasantly wicked’.<sup>161</sup> In contrast to Maria’s sexualised demeanour, which is responsible for her subsequent transgressions of normative femininity, Antoni’s ability to engage successfully in such amorous teasing is perceived as an acceptable aspect of normative masculinity, which increases his self-esteem as a man, thereby making him feel sexually powerful and highlighting his masculinity to both men and women. Not only the resident ladies’ man, however, Antoni is also the village entrepreneur known ‘up and down the Kingdom [...] as the arbiter of fashion’.<sup>162</sup> Representing the Kingdom of Buganda as *ensi* (country) throughout, Kimenye communicates her identification, and that of her characters, with Buganda as opposed to Uganda. Antoni’s ‘role of the big businessman’, nevertheless, enables him to give full rein to his flirtatious nature whilst earning his living, which he does from the sale of, among other things, *busuti*. Although in the modern day the *busuti* is regarded as the Ugandan national dress for women, it originates from Buganda and is the traditional dress of that Kingdom, thereby emphasising the notion of Buganda as *ensi*.<sup>163</sup> Similarly, Kimenye’s controlled employment of select Luganda terms such as ‘*busuti*’ (Female traditional dress), ‘*shamba*’ (garden/farmland) and ‘*Ssaza*’ (County), as opposed to any form of dialect which may alienate European readers, reinforces the representation of Buganda as *ensi* since Luganda is mainly spoken by the Baganda. Refraining from providing translations or the inclusion of a glossary, as in general the meaning of the indigenous terms are readily inferred from the text, Kimenye writes in Standard English combined with a good scattering of Luganda thrown in. The juxtaposition of Luganda and English testifies to Kimenye’s hybrid identity but is also a device that draws European readers into the atmosphere and tone of the stories whilst simultaneously ensuring the text remains accessible to both African and European readers.

Since Antoni is depicted as a man who appreciates the opposite sex, he cannot help but be ‘dazzled’<sup>164</sup> by Maria’s womanly charms, and Kimenye depicts a humorous episode that involves Antoni courting Maria with a constant stream of trinkets, *busuti*, towels, and all manner of other things from his shop. In general, the

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p.57.

villagers welcome the union, since the liaison ensures that Maria diverts her favours towards Antoni and not the husbands of others. But the outcome is doomed as Antoni, flattered by her attention fails to comprehend 'that Maria had no clear boundary line between love and friendship' and responds in much the same manner regardless of who is sweet-talking her.<sup>165</sup> The affair culminates with Antoni coming to his senses regarding his depleted financial situation and a brawl in Maria's Happy Bar caused by his realisation that Maria has been selling his gifts to others. Order is restored when Antoni marries his machinist, Victoria, who takes over the running of the Kalasanda shop. Significantly, Victoria could not be more different from Maria. Sewing *busuti* and sheets for Antoni's Emporium, Victoria 'quickly gained a reputation for being surly, since she neither invited nor offered confidences, and, to all intents and purposes, took not the slightest interest in what was going on in Kalasanda'.<sup>166</sup> Kimenye portrays Victoria as the strong, silent type, not given to gossip and the epitome of respectability. Existing at the opposite ends of the scale, 'Victoria's uninteresting bosom' cannot compare with Maria's luscious curves.<sup>167</sup> Failing to recognise any form of kindred spirit 'the dour seamstress received [...] much the same oblique, ribald teasing which Maria could rarely resist bestowing on members of the Mothers' Union'.<sup>168</sup> Yet, whilst concentrating on their respective differences Maria overlooks their similarity, which is that they are both independently minded businesswomen. Victoria's sensible, level-headed approach to life enables her to comprehend the root cause of Antoni's failing business and take a firm grip of both Antoni and the business, thereby demonstrating an alternative form of female autonomy to that of Maria through the rejection of her position of 'Other' as defined by normative femininity. Hence, she is able to transgress boundaries whilst paradoxically managing to appear to remain within the confines of the boundaries of normative femininity.

Abasi Kiyimba states 'the family structure that comes through in Kimenye's tale protects the position of the man at its helm'.<sup>169</sup> The characters of Maria, Victoria and Nantondo, however, contradict this statement. All three characters are in total control of their destiny, requiring no man to take up a position at their helm. Like

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>169</sup> Kiyimba, p.244.



Maria and Victoria, Nantondo's occupation of her own particular *ekyanya* (space) and her subsequent autonomy is a fundamental part of her identity. By way of contrast to Maria and Victoria, however, Nantondo is a widow. Yet just as Maria manipulates men, so Nantondo, in her role of the village gossip and busybody, manipulates situations to her own advantage. Consequently, she is not above eavesdropping to maintain her local standing and readily passes on her knowledge of Maria to the smitten Antoni 'plus a few facts which she made up on the spur of the moment, as soon as she saw the way the wind blew'.<sup>170</sup> After all, since Nantondo relies 'entirely on Christian charity' she cannot run the risk of losing out on any potential rewards or payments that may come her way as a means of signifying appreciation for services rendered.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, the narrator confirms Nantondo makes 'it her business to be the chief witness and adviser, [and] nor were newspapers ever essential when she was in the vicinity'.<sup>172</sup> Neither is she above using her wiles to attempt to turn a situation to her own advantage, such as the time she witnesses the bewitching of Damieno. Rather than informing the *Ggombolola* (sub-County) Chief and leaving the matter in his capable hands,

Nantondo decided to ignore the official authority, and spread a general alarm from the compound of Yosefu Mukasa, the wealthy coffee farmer, who was locally reputed to have a certain amount of influence at Mengo. To reach the Mukasa homestead, it was necessary for Nantondo to pass several smaller houses where she would have been very welcome to stay and gossip, but she dismissed the temptation to tell the ordinary people of what she had just witnessed. After all, this time she really had news. Why waste it on the common herd? They would all know soon enough. Meanwhile she must prepare a good line for Yosefu Mukasa. Who knows? He might think it worth while to mention her name at Mengo ... she could visualize him having a confidential chat with the Kabaka and, if the affair was properly handled, it was highly possible that she would receive some special recognition – a pension, say, or better still, a piece of really good land. If the villagers got the first wind of this, it would emerge as something everybody saw happen, and all would be lost.<sup>173</sup>

Strong-willed and independent, Nantondo's transgression of official procedures is representative of her expertise at manipulating a situation to gain the most benefit from it and illustrates her occupation of her own particular *ekyanya*.

In her representation of Maria, Antoni and Nantondo, I suggest that hybridity is in evidence since African characters situated within an African setting draw on the

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<sup>170</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*, p.57.

<sup>171</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda*, p.71.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., pp.9-10.

popular European stereotypes of the man-eater, the womaniser and the busybody. By contrast, Ogot's characterisation of Nyapol in *The Promised Land*, for instance, illustrates her depiction of a good Luo/African wife as 'many people in this new land had remarked how strong she was in the fields and how well she cultivated the land'.<sup>174</sup> Similarly, her representation of the Nyamwezi medicine man draws on the African stereotyping of the indigenous people of Tanganyika as a people with particular links to witchcraft. The examples not only offer an indication of the difference in style adopted by the two writers, but also bear witness to their respective identities. Hence, Kimenye's hybrid identity is reflected in her portrayal of African characters that exhibit aspects of behaviour which are more generally allied to recognisable European stock characters, whilst Ogot's depiction of specifically African characters bear witness to her essentially African identity.

Kimenye makes manifest the notion of an inclusive African hybrid society through her representation of culturally hybrid characters. For example, the president of the Western inspired Mother's Union, Mrs. Lutaya, 'has a reputation for wearing shoes in the house',<sup>175</sup> which is a very European thing to do. Similarly, Antoni, who is portrayed as 'resplendent in a green shirt, tight blue trousers, matching socks and pointed shoes with built up heels' epitomizes the latest in 1960s European fashion for the young, trendy man-about-town.<sup>176</sup> Likewise, Kimenye represents Samuel Musizi, the *Ggombolola* Chief as culturally hybrid. Having 'completed an extensive course in Local Government at Oxford', Samuel demonstrates his hybridity through his attire by sporting a combination of traditional Ugandan *kanzu* (embroidered tunic) and tweed jacket complete with leather-patched elbows that would be quite in keeping with his Oxford college.<sup>177</sup> His modernity is supported, as is Antoni's, by a preference for the Westernised nightclubs and popular dance halls of Mengo. Such culturally hybridised characters testify to the heterogeneity of Kalasanda thereby demonstrating that many of the people of Kalasanda have moved away from a point of view that regards the world in terms of binary opposites.

I interpret Kimenye's observation of African society in terms of her opening a dialogue with society in an attempt at homogenisation. Consequently, by merging culturally divergent elements within individual characters represented as residing in a

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<sup>174</sup> Ogot, *The Promised Land*, p.67.

<sup>175</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda*, p.6.

<sup>176</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*, p.58.

<sup>177</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda*, p.9.



typical Buganda village, Kimenye proposes that through the process of hybridity the individual aspects that construct a character, that in turn forms a part of Kalasanda society as a whole, dissolve. Hence, old and new, African and European, become difficult to separate because they are a part of both the individual's, and in turn society's identity. Furthermore, since black is the European perception of the opposite of white, through her characterisation Kimenye skilfully demonstrates that the people of Kalasanda display characteristics that compare with characters familiar to European readers. Kimenye thereby removes boundaries constructed by Eurocentric ideology and challenges European racist values of difference and the superiority/inferiority binary.

Kimenye textualises hybridity in 'The Bewitching of Damieno', through her juxtaposition of the traditional Baganda belief in witchcraft and the more contemporary belief in Christianity. That she juxtaposes these diverse beliefs is a point that links her to Ogot whom I have argued also merges elements of culturally unrelated beliefs in *The Promised Land*. However, whilst I suggested that Ochola's religious hybridity could be perceived in terms of the challenge it poses to the authority of the dominant ideology and hence the potentially liberating outcome, Kimenye's depiction of witchcraft and its juxtaposition with Christianity has been misunderstood. Reading reality into the texts and so dismissing her work as inconsequential, Welbourn condemns Kimenye for failing to present a factual account of the actuality of the prevalence of notions relating to witchcraft. The narrator of *Kalasanda* comments:

It was the word 'Witchcraft' that gave rise to the rush. Having lain dormant in the tribal language for so very long, it produced a delicious, chilly tingle down the spine, and filled minds with at least a hundred exciting speculations when it was proclaimed in the true rich fullness of its dramatic sense.<sup>178</sup>

Fictionalising an event she witnessed and so drawing on aspects of memory, Kimenye builds a sense of suspense and drama for the reader, who in general is willing to suspend disbelief when engaged in reading fiction.<sup>179</sup> Yet Welbourn remarks, 'Anyone who knows rural Buganda knows that, despite legal, administrative and ecclesiastical censure, witchcraft beliefs have remained active'.<sup>180</sup> He similarly berates Kimenye for representing a crucifix-wearing character with a markedly

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>179</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.

<sup>180</sup> Welbourn, p.7.



Catholic name who raises no objection to a proposal to send for the Protestant 'Reverend'.<sup>181</sup> Addressing Damieno, the *Ggombolola* Chief says:

"Look! This is a Christian kingdom, and from your name I imagine that you too are a Christian. We all know that the power of the cross is stronger than any man's magic. If Yosefu gives you the crucifix he is wearing around his neck, will you have sufficient faith to step outside?" [...] "Shall I send for the Reverend?" suggested Kibuka.<sup>182</sup>

Whilst it is not impossible to view Kimenye's merging of aspects of differing faiths as inconsistent and factually incorrect, an alternative reading can be found in the light of the culturally innovative and hybrid space occupied by Kimenye herself. This is strengthened further by the acknowledgement of the existence of the Islamic faith in Kalasanda,<sup>183</sup> in addition to the tendency of the majority of the people of Kalasanda to negotiate the contact zone and hence merge their belief in the powers of the Sacred Tree with a belief in, and the worshiping of the Christian God. The failure of the Eurocentric Mothers' Union crusade to remove this pagan symbol represents a victory for hybridity and cultural diversity in Kalasanda. While the dominant ideology continues to seek to silence the existence of a belief in such traditional symbols of worship, encouragingly cultural diversity of this nature is apparent in present day Uganda. On a trip to the village of Namusera, Kimenye's inspiration for the *Kalasanda* texts, I was privileged to witness such a merging of faiths. Nature spirits - or what Bukenya refers to as *musambo* - form one of the basis's of traditional ideas and 'may inhabit stones or trees or wells or rivers'.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, an information plaque located at the Uganda Wildlife Educational Centre in Entebbe states that big trees 'have always been associated with spiritual power. Most people believe that ancestral spirits live in such big trees and they can be cleansed or blessed by offering sacrifices or worshipping them.'<sup>185</sup> Consequently, modern day villagers of Namusera, whilst practising Christians, see nothing unusual or strange in happily continuing to worship the Sacred Tree Kimenye draws artistic inspiration from to re-present in her texts. Thus, the people of Namusera put their traditional indigenous faith in Maama Naluwembe, herself an ex-Catholic nun who intercedes and communicates with the tree on their behalf, and thereby demonstrate their support for cultural hybridity. Similarly, through her transgression of religious cultural boundaries, Kimenye's tales

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., pp.7-8.

<sup>182</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda*, p.20.

<sup>183</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*, p.59.

<sup>184</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Austin Bukenya.

<sup>185</sup> Information plaque located in UWEC entitled *Elders' Tree*, para. 4 of 5.



of bewitching, and attempts to eradicate traditional African cultural elements can be perceived as subversive. This is because they seek to overthrow the authority of the dominant ideology, constructed as it is along the lines of binary opposites, and instead attempt to promote a more positive and innovative culturally inclusive hybrid society.

Nazareth defines Kimenye as a writer worthy of note because she describes African life 'from "the inside"'.<sup>186</sup> However, considering the above discussion, it is surprising that he nevertheless regards her as an 'uncommitted writer' because of her seemingly apolitical writing style.<sup>187</sup> Although not political in the style of Thiong'o's writing, Kimenye's stories and the characters therein can still be considered as representative of writing back to colonialism because of her apparent textualization of an emergent dialogue between African and European cultures. Through her creation of a hybrid narrative style, the impact of which is noticeable upon characterisation, narrative form and the representation of African village life, Kimenye merges culturally divergent elements to the extent that it is difficult to separate them and to define positively specific aspects as African or European. Hence, the combination of the narrative form and content is hybrid because whilst she gains inspiration from African village life and people, her subject matter can tenuously be regarded as being represented in terms of a European comic writing tradition. Kimenye admits that European writer Nancy Mitford, whose ready use of wit is apparent in her novels, is a big influence on her and states, 'It sounds very funny, but her [Mitford's] sense of the ludicrous is wonderful – it's almost schoolboy humour.'<sup>188</sup> Consequently, from the humorous tone of the *Kalasanda* texts, that J. Bardolph notes 'is rare in African fiction',<sup>189</sup> Kimenye can be perceived as engaging in dialogue with, and drawing on the writing style of Mitford. Overall, Kimenye performs an act of homogenization through her writing that is both subversive and culturally innovative in that her construction of a narrative structure, characters and the space occupied by them cannot be easily split into binaries of African or European.

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<sup>186</sup> Nazareth, p.171.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p.167.

<sup>188</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.

<sup>189</sup> J. Bardolph, 'Kimenye, Barbara', *Literature Online*

<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=R0079093&divLevel=0&queryId=...> [accessed 6 December 2005], para. 2 of 2.

## Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye: Re-negotiating Identities

I indicated earlier that Ogundipe-Leslie expresses her discomfort regarding the capability of an outsider to occupy an alternative culture and write from that perspective. Similarly, Sara Ahmed voices her misgivings concerning what she conceives as 'a fantasy that one can inhabit the place of the other'.<sup>190</sup> Yet Macgoye contradicts this viewpoint. She was born into a white working-class family in Southampton, England, but has come to be considered one of Kenya's 'most important literary figures and, in the words of a leading Kenyan critic, a "national treasure"'.<sup>191</sup> Macgoye advocates an approach to life that celebrates cultural hybridity and heterogeneity. She says, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there neither male nor female [sic]: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'.<sup>192</sup> Unlike Huxley, whose apparent racism in her texts indicates otherwise, Macgoye's inference is that distinctions should be inappropriate since regardless of gender, colour, culture, faith, and so on, we all belong to the human race.

The hybridity of Macgoye's lived experience is manifest in *Coming to Birth* (1986) through a process not witnessed in *Red Strangers*, *The Promised Land* or the *Kalasanda* story collections: the process of the re-negotiation of identity and the perception of the text as an attempt to write place, home, location and self. So confident is Macgoye about the effectiveness of the reconstruction of her own identity that she writes herself, in a small way, into *Coming to Birth*. She initially appears at the opening of the text in 1956 as a young woman who has not yet learnt to speak Luo, but who is staying at the mission house and helping the older European mission leader, Ahoya.<sup>193</sup> Later, in 1963 at the Independence Day celebrations in Kisumu, the protagonist of the story 'Paulina spotted the little white girl who had been in Pumwani, with two children now and a black husband, and, though they did not really recognise her, they greeted her civilly in Luo'.<sup>194</sup> Plainly, during the intervening years the character of Macgoye, who remains nameless in the text, has crossed over

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<sup>190</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Other in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 166.

<sup>191</sup> J. Roger Kurtz, *Nyarloka's Gift: The Writing of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye* (Nairobi: Mvule Africa, 2005), p.1.

<sup>192</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Talking Gender: Conversations with Kenyan Women Writers*, ed. by Mike Kuria (Nairobi: Peepal Tree Press, 2003), 51-57, p. 51.

<sup>193</sup> Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*, p. 20 – 21.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p.52.



consciousnesses as indicated by her apparent transculturation and assimilation into Luo society. Nevertheless, the notion of the reconfiguration of one's identity applies not only to Macgoye as she appears as a character in the text, but also to her reality. Her marriage to a Luo and subsequent learning of the Luo culture and language facilitated her integration and acceptance into an alternative culture that traditionally represents a space that would generally be occupied by another, but it simultaneously influences the construction of her personal identity. Arriving in Nairobi in the 1950s to be perceived and socially constructed as *mzungu* like Kimenye, Macgoye effectively re-negotiated her identity as indicated by the widespread acceptance of her as a Kenyan. It is her successful reconfiguration of identity that authorises Macgoye to comment, 'I see myself as a Kenyan and the sub-category is bound to be Luo.'<sup>195</sup>

Given that the context of Macgoye's life impacts upon her hybridized state which in turn manifests itself in the re-construction and re-birth of her identity, *Coming to Birth* can be interpreted as signifying the distinct notions of literal and metaphorical births. Paulina gives birth to Martin Okeyo and expects to give birth again after the story ends. The text also traces Kenya's history from the pre-independence to the post-independence years, which Tirop Peter Simatei attributes to Macgoye's 'desire to confirm her affinity with it [Kenya's history]', but which nevertheless signifies the coming to birth of a new and independent Kenya.<sup>196</sup> More pertinent to my concerns relating to spatial relations is the recognition of the notion of the coming to birth, or reconfiguration, of Paulina's identity as a confident, autonomous Luo woman. J. Roger Kurtz states that 'the present progressive of the title suggests that for Paulina [...] birth is a process rather than the work of a moment, and that this process has no foreseeable conclusion'.<sup>197</sup> Hence, the metamorphosis of Paulina's identity and her subsequent re-positionings into new and transgressive spaces are indicators of an ongoing progression which begins shortly after her arrival in Nairobi, and that does not reach a point and remain static, but rather continues to grow and develop, as does her life experience. As a sixteen-year-old recently married girl-woman arriving in Nairobi to live with her husband, Paulina's identity is necessarily linked to the notion of the stranger and/or visitor. This is due to the crossing of geographical boundaries she has to undertake to create and appropriate the

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<sup>195</sup> Macgoye in *Talking Gender*, 51-67, p.53.

<sup>196</sup> Tirop Peter Simatei, *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa* (Bayreuth, Germany: Bayreuth University Press, 2001), p. 133.

<sup>197</sup> Kurtz, *Nyarloka's Gift*, p.104.



traditional Luo woman's space that locates her within the Third Space of a Luo wife. Transported from traditional village life to the urban space in order to take control of what is constructed as her culturally normative position, the wife, Paulina's unfamiliarity and unease are apparent. Arriving at the Nairobi home she is to share with her husband Martin, Macgoye plays out the situation as follows:

"I am exceedingly tired," she said, casting frightened eyes around. He poured water from the teapot into a mug and handed it to her to drink. Afraid to spit on the cement floor, she drank a little of it without the ritual and then held her mouth, feeling sick.

"I hope you are pleased," he said. "I got it ready just for you."

Indeed, she knew he had; a cupboard, a basin, a lamp, a teapot, even a tablecloth. She was very lucky. She should offer thanks. But how could she tell him it was the noises she feared, coming into the room across the partition, floating through the bare rafters below the patched tin? At present there was only the drone of old ladies' voices in the back and the clatter of pans, but at night she knew there would be high words and screams and giggles and cruel laughter set loose in the house that was not a house, and the words would be the more menacing in languages one did not know. And how could she complain of this when she did not know how she knew?<sup>198</sup>

Macgoye reinforces the fact that the spatial relations are alien to Paulina when she gets lost trying to retrace her steps home after being discharged from hospital following the miscarriage of her first pregnancy. Hence, it comes as no surprise to discover that in her alienation from the traditional village space to which she is accustomed, she is readily recognisable as a stranger and that 'the general tenor was that the stranger [Paulina] was behaving suspiciously'.<sup>199</sup> Wandering the city, Paulina is unaware of the dangers to her welfare since 'she did not yet know how much there was to be frightened of in Nairobi'.<sup>200</sup> Yet somewhat naively, some may argue, since as Ahoya points out, in the Luo tradition 'your husband would have given you a token beating while the guests were still there', neither is Paulina aware that a threat to her well-being exists in the form of her husband.<sup>201</sup> Shamed by her absence of two nights, Martin beats Paulina until 'she was discoloured with bruises'.<sup>202</sup> Slaughter's assertion that Ahoya's attitude to Paulina's beating reflects 'a progressive and urban beating which exceeds the codes of "ethnic" custom' further underlines Paulina's crossing of geographical and spatial boundaries whilst highlighting one of the

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<sup>198</sup> Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*, p.5.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p.22.



differences related to the alien urban space in which she now finds herself.<sup>203</sup> Her subsequent reconfiguration of identity is an occurrence that sets Paulina apart from characters such as Maria in the *Kalasanda* texts, for example, since whilst Kimenye represents in her an autonomous woman occupying a transgressive space, her identity does not undergo any form of rupture that prompts the re-assemblage and revising of her identity.

It is apparent that the urban space is representative of a new and very different space; a space of cultural diversity that is yet unknown but somehow simultaneously unconsciously recognised by Paulina. In transposing Paulina from the village to the city, Macgoye introduces Anzaldúa's notion of the Borderlands and the associated new *mestiza* consciousness, thereby taking the reader to spaces her characters have not been before. Situating Paulina in what Anzaldúa would define as *los intersticios* because she inhabits two very different worlds, Macgoye bears witness to Paulina's alienation by situating her in a seat of cultural diversity: Nairobi. Macgoye represents the city as a diverse mix of cultural traditions, a Borderland area wherein cultural boundaries are blurred. Hence, while Ahoya is present,

encouraging her [Paulina] to attend Luo meetings in the little church of St John, with those other women who did not understand the Sunday Swahili services very well [...]. Martin encouraged her and bought her a New Testament which she could compare with the Luo *Muma* word by word.<sup>204</sup>

Similarly, Paulina begins to make the acquaintance of 'several of the Brethren women' and to learn how to converse in Swahili, which is recognised as 'one of the measures of unity of the intertribal group'.<sup>205</sup> The fact that the group is an intertribal group is a major difference between village and city life, whilst Paulina's efforts to fit are illustrated by her attempt to speak 'beautiful Swahili', which acts as an indicator of her burgeoning new *mestiza* consciousness. However, she also recognises that in a city like Nairobi where disparate cultures and traditions meet and merge many of the women occupy the space defined as *los intersticios*.<sup>206</sup> Consequently, Paulina discovers:

that not all Nairobi women were like herself. Not all of them had husbands, to start with, or they had husbands who were away, they claimed, because of the Emergency. But even those who had husbands often received visitors at odd

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<sup>203</sup> Joseph R. Slaughter, 'Master Plans: Designing (National) Allegories of Urban Space and Metropolitan Subjects for Postcolonial Kenya', *Research in African Literatures* 35:1 (Spring 2004), 30 – 51 (p. 35).

<sup>204</sup> Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*, p.27.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p.28.



hours [...] or sometimes went trading at the market without telling their husbands what they earned. They bought clothes or cigarettes or perfumes, for they said in Majengo a woman could not keep her man against all the professional competition if she did not use means to keep herself beautiful.<sup>207</sup>

Occupying a space that bears no relation to the space that the dominant traditional Luo ideology initially interpellated Paulina into, she grasps that women in Nairobi do not fit with her expectations. Rather, it is the women who remain in the villages that conform to her perception of normative femininity, which comprises child-bearing and rearing, tending the farmland, and preserving and storing food for the clan.<sup>208</sup> Highlighting that the urban space is conducive to the process of renegotiation of identity where the blurring of boundaries occurs, the narrator describes events as represented in a play at the National Theatre:

in something very similar to a Luo dance a young man suddenly started jumping up and down on one spot like a Kamba, whom you might see performing in the stadium before a rally started, or again it made you think of the Israeli sect in their white robes and turbans: some were always running but she [Paulina] had seen them jump like this also to the dull drumbeat on a Sunday, head and shoulders appearing higher and higher over the hedge round the flats, while onlookers stopped to stare and shout encouragement: it beat the Salvation Army for a show [...]. But these acrobatics did not fit with the Luo dance, and then the words switched to English and the costumes seemed to be coastal wrappers, all bright and strapless, with not a modest Moslem *buibui* in sight. There was nothing to point out what you were supposed to believe.<sup>209</sup>

Such diversity is not apparent in *Red Strangers* or *The Promised Land* wherein Huxley and Ogot juxtapose and/or merge European influences with aspects of Gikuyu or Luo belief respectively. The *Kalasanda* texts do highlight the beginnings of the presence of Borderlands in that Kimenye depicts the simultaneous existence of Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, and the traditional Baganda belief in witchcraft. However, as the above extract illustrates, Macgoye presents the reader with a new frontier land of a type not projected by Huxley, Ogot or Kimenye, wherein multiple cultural traditions begin to fuse together in the Borderlands. Likewise, prompted by Paulina's contemplation of the space culturally hybrid children will occupy in Kenya, Valerie Kibera affirms 'one of Macgoye's major themes is the forging of a national consciousness that will enfold Kenyans of all races and ethnic backgrounds.'<sup>210</sup> The positive nature of the obscuring and potential dissolving of cultural margins

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., pp.32-33.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p.118.

<sup>210</sup> Valerie Kibera, 'Adopted Motherlands: The Novels of Marjorie Macgoye and Bessie Head', in *Motherlands: Black Woman's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (London: The Women's Press, 1991), pp. 310 – 329 (p. 319).



consequently links to, and impacts upon the notion of identity, since it facilitates the blurring of boundaries resulting in a new *mestiza* consciousness of the type apparent in Paulina and in the contrasting figure of the woman 'Other'.

In *Coming to Birth*, critics have recognised Macgoye's endeavour to highlight and value the experience of Kenyan women and their growing awareness of a new emergent autonomy and self-confidence.<sup>211</sup> Simatei verifies that 'custom in a patriarchal society paves the way for the oppression of women.'<sup>212</sup> Hence, Paulina eventually reaches the point where to lose the initiative in a situation is not desirable<sup>213</sup> and she realises that to return to live in the village would be like taking a step back in time as it would involve occupying the traditional space that village life constructs as normative for a Luo woman.<sup>214</sup> Consequently, Paulina's autonomy is reliant upon her redefinition of traditional women's roles and spaces. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido affirm:

African women's writing consistently portrays women in various struggles for self-definition. A character's ability to define herself is shaped both by her understanding of the boundaries by which society circumscribes her and by her ability to transcend those boundaries and attain self-actualization while remaining nonetheless within her society.<sup>215</sup>

Focused through her battle to gain financial success and self-sufficiency, Paulina's appropriation of a new and innovative space, and her gradual refashioning of an autonomous identity exemplifies just such a representation. Ironically, it is the female normative activity of crocheting, which Paulina starts to learn in her marital home village of Gem, which permits her to climb the first rung of the ladder towards the challenging of her constructed identity and the space she is traditionally expected to occupy, and the ensuing attainment of female emancipation. Paulina's hard work and practice not only enables her to bring a feminine touch to her city home in the slums whilst conforming to normative feminine behaviour, but also has the unforeseen

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<sup>211</sup> See J. Roger Kurtz, *Nyarloka's Gift: The Writing of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye* (Nairobi: Mvule Africa, 2005), p. 104, T. Michael Mboya, 'Writing Herstory: The Woman and History in Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*', *The Nairobi Journal of Literature*, 1 March (2003), pp. 34 – 41, (p. 34) and Valerie Kibera, 'Adopted Motherlands: The Novels of Marjorie Macgoye and Bessie Head', in *Motherlands: Black Woman's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*, ed. by Susheila Nasta (London: The Women's Press, 1991), pp. 310 – 329 (p. 311).

<sup>212</sup> Tirop Peter Simatei, *The Novel and the Politics of Nation Building in East Africa* (Bayreuth, Germany: Bayreuth University Press, 2001), p. 142.

<sup>213</sup> Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*, p.133.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>215</sup> Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, 'African Women Writers: Toward a Literary History', in *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures*, ed. by Oyekan Owomoyela (Lincoln: London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 311 – 346 (p. 336).



benefit of bringing in orders to crochet lacy cloth covers for others for money. This allows her to contribute 'thirty or forty shillings each month' to the household income, and acts as a signifier for the beginnings of her emancipation from the occupation of the space constructed for her by traditional Luo custom which, for example, prevents her from allowing Martin to carry her cases and to discuss her pregnancy with him.<sup>216</sup> Her continued success in 'contriving a profit from her crochet', along with her persistent voicing of her desire to attend the European-run classes at the Homecraft Training School in Kisumu eventually encourage Martin to help Paulina in her bid to apply for a place on the course.<sup>217</sup> She is the youngest woman in the class and slighted because of her childless state because it is not considered normative in traditional Luo culture. However, although Paulina's miscarriages prevent her from occupying the Third Space of motherhood, Kurtz highlights that whilst 'her childlessness is a source of derision in the rural home and among some of her fellow students, [...] it earns her the praise of the Homecraft School's European staff and as a result she advances to a position of leadership'.<sup>218</sup> As a result of attending the classes, which are considered an acceptable meeting space where married women from various cultures mix, talk and learn, Paulina is ultimately able to relinquish her dependence upon Martin and support herself because of her subsequent appointment to the position of club leader. Contemplating her position, Paulina realises 'she had become free, in a sense, of Martin, and she had changed. She provided for herself, lived by herself. [...] She made decisions for herself'.<sup>219</sup> The effect of this transgression into the space of *los intersticios* and her subsequent new *mestiza* consciousness has such a positive influence upon Paulina's emotional autonomy that she is able to stand up for herself and assert her requirements. Very different from the inexperienced and frightened teenager who worried over whether her husband would send her back to her parents, or alternatively beat her to death, Paulina takes full control of her life, and in so doing redefines her identity and the space she occupies. After suffering an attack that 'was not experimental like that long-ago beating in Pumwani' in addition to a public denouncement at the hands of Martin,<sup>220</sup> Paulina finally,

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<sup>216</sup> Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*, p.30.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p.40.

<sup>218</sup> Kurtz, *Nyarloka's Gift*, p.115.

<sup>219</sup> Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*, p.46.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p.56.



knew what she wanted. On the Monday after Christmas she reported to her supervisor's office in Kisumu that her husband had assaulted her because he was taking another wife, accused her of infidelity and tried to set the club members against her. She had tried to bear an unsatisfactory marriage for eight years. Now she could bear no more. She would like a transfer to Kisumu where she could live in a municipal house and educated opinion would defend her. She was legally married and could not accept a polygamous arrangement.<sup>221</sup>

In asserting herself thus, we see the simultaneous rupturing of normative femininity and transgression of the boundaries of Luo tradition, which is manifest in Paulina's renewed determination to reconfigure her identity and to appropriate an innovative space for herself in the contemporary life of the newly independent Kenya.

Macgoye's interweaving of history with fiction inspires Paulina's venture into the field of politics, which comprises an element of the innovative space she constructs for herself and contributes to her MP employer Mr M.'s definition of her as a 'new woman'.<sup>222</sup> Paulina relates to the figure of the single woman MP, Chelagat Mutai, because her treatment and suffering is relevant to her as a woman:

Chelagat, a strapping young woman and single, was within her comprehension, cut off from friends and constituents, humiliated in the cell, sent out to dig, kept from the news of other sufferers.<sup>223</sup>

Mutai's imprisonment impacts so forcefully on Paulina that, encouraged by Mr M.'s wife, she becomes involved in the attempt to rally the support of other women in the campaign to release Mutai from jail, and in so doing she crosses over into the space of the 'militant activist'.<sup>224</sup> Whilst defeat seems inevitable, Paulina is nevertheless still not 'prepared to accept "can't" as a standing answer'.<sup>225</sup> Hence her transgression of boundaries relating to the position of the Luo wife, and the level of autonomy she has subsequently achieved finally provides her with the confidence to defend her position over the Mutai case and in so doing to oppose Martin outright.

Paulina's gradual reconstruction of identity and accompanying appropriation of a pioneering space for herself is attended by a new-found confidence that was not apparent upon her arrival in Nairobi, but which licences her to interpret Luo custom to suit her life. Hence, in the knowledge that she has previously conceived from Martin and can no doubt do so again if she wishes to bear children and conform to normative

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p.139.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p.111.

<sup>224</sup> Austin Bukonya in T. Michael Mboya, 'Writing Herstory: The Woman and History in Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*', *The Nairobi Journal of Literature*, 1 March (2003), pp. 34 – 41 (p. 37).

<sup>225</sup> Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*, p.113.

Luo feminine behaviour, she allows herself to be persuaded by Simon that 'in custom she should seek a child where she could'.<sup>226</sup> She is therefore able and confident enough to cope with the 'shame'<sup>227</sup> of being identified as Simon's mistress, expertly deflecting a proposed chat with the pastor's wife pertaining to fidelity and community leaders' responsibilities. The impact of her relationship and newly discovered self-assurance is apparent in that 'she felt less tired these days and more sure of herself: she was a little fatter and took more care to oil her hair and her skin'.<sup>228</sup> Whilst it is evident that the effects of Paulina's extra marital affair have a positive influence upon her growing autonomy, Elsie Cloete confirms that:

Any woman who dares to be different in the Kenyan socio-political context can become the focus of gossip. Definitions of prostitution keep shifting – a divorced woman, a feminist, a role model for other women is often designated as 'other', as a prostitute.<sup>229</sup>

In representing a protagonist that redefines her identity in this manner, Macgoye challenges the authority of the construction of the woman 'Other' – mistress, absentee wife, autonomous woman, prostitute etc. - by casting Paulina in that role. Hence, drawing strength from the European opinion that a married and childless woman can be 'like a single woman, occupied and earning money',<sup>230</sup> Paulina demonstrates through her tenacity and application in classes that it is possible 'for a young woman of twenty-four to move alone to an official house, for her to gather women together and issue programmes to them and buy in stores and collect fees'.<sup>231</sup> Instead, Paulina likens herself to a man in that she fends for, and supports herself. Furthermore, her commitment to her new identity is reinforced, when, discovering that she is pregnant by Simon, she remains true to her chosen state of independence. Confirming her pregnancy to Simon,

Paulina had never felt more alert, more detached, more sure of herself. [...] "I thank you for the child, Simon," she said. "It is what I wanted. Whatever quarrels may come, no one can doubt that the child is mine. You also have had what you wanted [...]. A child of mine does not have to look up to a father who will not stand up for him. Go now."<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>229</sup> Elsie Cloete, 'An 'Eye' for an 'I': Discipline and Gossip', *Social Identities*, 9:3 (September 2003) 401 – 422 (p. 411).

<sup>230</sup> Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*, p.44.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., pp.58-59.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p.68.



Having reached a point in time when she is both financially and emotionally independent, Paulina no longer requires a man by whom to define either herself or the space she occupies. Hence, having been under no illusions as to Simon's reasons for entering into the relationship from the outset, and having conceived the child she wanted, she has no qualms about telling him that she has no further need of his company. Despite Paulina's transgression of traditional boundaries constituted by her relationship with Simon, and the very conspicuous evidence of that relationship in the form of her son, Martin Okeyo, Paulina stands by her adopted transgressive position that tradition constructs as the woman 'Other', or prostitute figure. Her assurance regarding her occupation of *los intersticios* along with her new *mestiza* consciousness is evidenced in her refusal to move and 'go away', in order to prevent what tradition regards as 'the public evidence of shame'.<sup>233</sup> However, maybe because her confidence relating to her reconfigured identity transmits itself to others around her, particularly since she occupies a space that enables her to provide for her extended family and to turn down a proposal of marriage from an eligible 'young widower', Paulina finds that after the birth of Okeyo, rather than being treated as 'Other' 'she was more respected'.<sup>234</sup> Macgoye thereby demonstrates that through the transgression of boundaries of normative feminine behaviour, it is possible for Kenyan women to draw on aspects of thought associated with alternative cultures to achieve a level of emancipation whilst also escaping the label of 'Other'.

Nevertheless, it seems that the construction and demonisation of the woman 'Other' in the form of the prostitute and/or mistress emerges because 'in custom there was no place for the unmarried'.<sup>235</sup> Kurtz confirms, however, that the 'city can also contain possibilities for women. Because it disrupts traditional social patterns, the city is, despite its nature as a male space, a site where women are at times able to create some measure of personal emancipation'.<sup>236</sup> Hence, representing a contrast to the characterisation of Paulina, the spaces that the characters of Fatima, Fauzia and Nancy occupy are worthy of closer analysis. Macgoye's depiction of Fatima as a sexual and seductive woman calls to mind the figure of Maria in Kimenye's *Kalasanda* novels. Martin has a liaison with Fatima during the early years of his

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p.70.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>236</sup> J. Roger Kurtz, 'Post-Marked Nairobi: Writing the City in Contemporary Kenya', in *The Post-Colonial Condition of African Literature*, ed. by Daniel Gover, John Conteh-Morgan & Jane Bryce (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000), pp. 103 – 110 (p. 108).

marriage to Paulina, and later 'he visited Fatima occasionally in her room – she was skilful, but domineering as well as expensive'.<sup>237</sup> Unlike Maria, however, Fatima charges a fee for her services. Yet, rather than having the effect of disempowering and subjugating her, because she retains the position of power over Martin, and presumably her other men, Fatima creates her own space divorced from the notions of the prostitute advanced by the dominant ideology, and in so doing achieves her own measure of personal emancipation.

By contrast, Fauzia, a younger sister of Fatima's, apparently shows no sign of autonomy. Having gradually increased the frequency of her visits to Martin until she was staying overnight, Fauzia's aunt makes an unsuccessful formal visit to discuss the notion of marriage with Martin. Nevertheless, Fauzia 'crept back: it was the middle of the month and times were hard'.<sup>238</sup> Although, like Fatima, she is represented as sexually aware, 'giggling, perfumed and with a sound Swahili erotic education to warm his [Martin's] bed', by contrast, she is represented as financially dependent upon Martin, and in turn performs certain wifely domestic duties.<sup>239</sup> Similarly, Nancy, who also moves in with Martin, would seem to lack autonomy and be dependent upon him. Yet neither character is willing to conform totally to his expectations of a wife. Hence, when Martin tells Fauzia that a wife of his 'must be a Christian who would leave her hair unplaited and her ears without ornament, who would dig in the fields and plaster walls and leave her children fat and naked', she merely laughs, thereby demonstrating that she possesses the beginnings of an independent spirit.<sup>240</sup> Moreover, Nancy, too, is illustrated as being unwilling to commit to an arrangement that is not beneficial to her. Rather, she demonstrates that she regards herself not as tradition-bound but as a 'new Kenyan'. Indignant at the notion that she should take orders about her movements from Martin she reveals her sense of self, and in leaving Martin finally demonstrates that the power relations within their relationship are not conducive to her attainment of autonomy which Macgoye depicts as growing over the years. Consequently, Nancy reaches the point

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<sup>237</sup> Macgoye, *Coming to Birth*, p.47.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p.51.



where she can declare 'any security I've got comes from my own work',<sup>241</sup> and as a result she is not prepared to be defined by the 'sharing [of] anyone else's name'.<sup>242</sup>

Although Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot adopt an African perspective, the space they occupy is different. Whereas Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot live(d) as indigenous members of African communities, Huxley situates herself as traveller/visitor/stranger. Hence, whilst she crosses colonial cultural boundaries by demonstrating an awareness of the new Third Space through her re-presentation in *Red Strangers* of characters that exhibit identities formed by the fusing of two disparate worlds and cultures, the narrative point of view of her body of writing indicates that this is not a space that she herself occupies. Rather, she bestrides two cultures by keeping a foot in each camp, and thereby positions herself in-between. In attempting to write and speak for Africans she (un)consciously projects her Eurocentric opinions onto that group by reinforcing racial differences. In so doing she validates Young's claim by demonstrating that the actual space she occupies is closer to the past than the new, progressive, and non-discriminatory space she may believe she occupies. By contrast, Ogot's life ensures her successful merging of disparate cultures, hence her own cultural hybridity and consequent occupation of the Third Space, which is also apparent in the characters she creates. In portraying Ochola, a hybrid character that successfully enters into the Third Space, she effectively increases the distance between him and the past that Young refers to, thereby transgressing ethnic and religious boundaries in an effort to depict the notion of a new identity founded upon the merging of heterogeneous elements.

Kimenye's identity and the innovative space she occupies are similarly founded upon heterogeneity. Both culturally and racially hybrid, the context of her life is informed by the combining of European and African influences. Thus, her *kizungu* imagination is significant and her writing represents a new emergent form of textuality that transgresses European and African narrative boundaries to draw on and combine European and African influences. Consequently, Kimenye's writing is transgressive, subversive and culturally innovative, resulting in a narrative structure, along with characters and the space they occupy which cannot be separated into binaries of African or European.

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., p.141.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p.116.

Macgoye contradicts concerns voiced by Ogundipe-Leslie and Ahmed that an outsider is incapable of effectively inhabiting an alternative culture to the one they are born into. On the contrary, she successfully re-negotiates her white, working-class identity to re-construct her identity and assimilate into the culture of her Luo husband because her perspective is that gender, racial, ethnic, and religious differences are irrelevant since we all belong to the human race. However, Macgoye transgresses boundaries of text in a manner not witnessed in the writing of Huxley, Kimenye or Ogot because she makes apparent her own lived experience in *Coming to Birth*. This gives rise to the notion that she uses the text in order to write place, home, location and self. Thus, the reconfiguration of identity applies to Macgoye, to the nameless character she appears as within the text, and to the other female characters previously discussed in *Coming to Birth* that transgress boundaries of normative femininity in the process of negotiating and occupying an innovative space in the contemporary life of the recently independent Kenya.



### 3. Woman, the Visitor: Re-Presenting the Female Authorial Voice

Thoughts of self-pity overcame me. Why should the boys be playing and enjoying themselves while I alone laboured for their greedy sakes? It was not fair. Why could they not be given some of the work so that I too might have a bit of fun? I had a right to play as well as anybody else.<sup>1</sup>

#### 'I Had a Right to Play as Well as Anybody Else'

In an act of transgressive resistance that foreshadows an autonomy discernable in select adult African women, Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu's short story 'The Hen and the Groundnuts' proceeds to show the character of the child asserting her independence at a young age through play by abandoning her duties and so subverting normative female behaviour. By way of contrast to traditional African thinking relating to the positioning and identity of women, the subtitle of this chapter refers to the perception by some of the discrimination of African girls and women, and their consequent preoccupation with, and right to, equality. In responding to this issue and the effect of the social construction of traditional African female identity, Zirimu's character, the female child 'Other', highlights this major concern of African women and hence opposes female oppression as constructed by Ugandan patriarchal society. The African female's 'natural' progression along the cycle of life comprises the experience of being a bride, thence a wife and bearing children. Zirimu foregrounds how the female child is constructed and located differently to the male child, whose right it is to relax, play, and enjoy, whilst his sister toils over domestic chores in preparation of the meal he is waiting to eat.<sup>2</sup>

Zirimu locates herself in the text with regard to her assessment of the African female's position in a patriarchal society. In direct contrast to 'highly artificial'<sup>3</sup> representations of African women confined by traditional culture, as evidenced in such texts as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or Okot p' Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, and dominant Western discourse which privileges prejudiced and partial

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<sup>1</sup> Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, 'The Hen and the Groundnuts', in *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology*, ed. by David Cook (London: Heinemann, 1965), pp. 137 – 139 (p. 138).

<sup>2</sup> Abasi Kiyimba also notes that 'it is in the earliest stages of life that young boys and girls are taught to see life differently, and develop lifelong attitudes towards themselves, towards each other, and towards life in general – both at the conscious and the subconscious levels.' See 'The Baby-Boy Syndrome in the Folktales of the Baganda', *Culture & Tradition*, 27 (2005), 94 – 108 (p. 94).

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; repr. Penguin, 1995), p. 21.



representations of non-Western culture, Zirimu's chosen strategic location offers an insight into an alternative and transgressive depiction of the position of the African girl and her interpellation into normative womanhood. Likewise this chapter analyses how Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot locate themselves in their respective texts, both in relation to dominant Western discourse and their construction of the African female and so emerges out of Said's notion of 'strategic location.'<sup>4</sup> I argue that the writers transgress accepted cultural boundaries to re-position themselves and their readers in relation to their texts. This chapter additionally asks how their location of themselves as 'Other' to the dominant modes of textual representation impacts upon their creation of textual matter.

While I am concerned with the writers' deliberate re-positionings as 'Other' in order to write from a (black) 'African' woman's perspective, it should be recognised that this is a deliberate stance that situates them in opposition to patriarchy thereby denoting their involvement in cultural politics. The central motif for the selection of texts is the notion of the African woman's journey that takes her from the status of girl to woman and hence incorporates a theme recurrent in the select texts: the figure of the 'bride'. This provides the opportunity to analyse the writers' involvement in cultural politics through their re-presentation of African women and the challenge to traditional notions of the boundaries of female identity that such characters represent. An examination of Huxley's *Red Strangers* prompts questions pertaining to her reason for attempting to adopt an alternative perspective and her notable lack of attention relating to female characters in comparison with male characters whilst analysing the degree to which she re-positions the African woman, if at all. This in turn provokes an inquiry into the level of success she achieves in adopting an alternative location than that dictated by the dominant ideology. Kimenye's *Runaway Bride* (1994)<sup>5</sup> and *Kayo's House* (1995)<sup>6</sup> both exhibit strong autonomous female characters, and Macgoye's *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* (1993)<sup>7</sup> exhibits a protagonist that uses prostitution as a way out of her role of junior wife. All three texts thereby demonstrate that the writers' location within the text indicates a certain sympathy for autonomous female African characters, which in turn highlights their chosen political stance in opposition to patriarchal structures within some societies in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride* (London: Macmillan, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *Kayo's House* (London: Macmillan Educational, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* (London: Macmillan, 1993).



Africa. This leads to a consideration of Susan Kiguli's observation regarding the resourcefulness of African women and the associated notion of nego-feminism. Finally, in *The Strange Bride* (1989),<sup>8</sup> Ogot presents a determined, independently minded African wife in her interpretation of a traditional Luo myth. The text illustrates her adoption of the perspective of traditional pre-colonial Kenya, which similarly can be perceived as locating her as 'Other'.

Within the context of the African woman's journey and the binary oppositions of 'girl' and 'woman', and 'stranger' and 'indigenous', this chapter studies the question of when an African girl - *muwala* in Luganda - is perceived to have become a woman - *mukasi* in Luganda. This leads to an exploration of the literal interpretations of a variety of African words with the meaning 'woman'. Using an assortment of African language terms for 'woman', I will consider their cultural meanings, thereby giving an insight into alternative notions that challenge Western feminist perceptions of 'woman' and her place in the world and associated behaviours. This investigation will thus enable me to analyse further the very particular type of space inhabited by African women, thereby making stronger links with the notion of their transgression of boundaries embedded in the roots of many of these African terms.

### **Strategic Location and the 'African' Woman Writer**

Orientalism, Said argues, divides the world into Westerners and the 'Other' and thus he states: 'Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them").'<sup>9</sup> In relation to Said's notion of strategic location he states that 'what he [the writer] says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as existential and as moral fact'.<sup>10</sup> Although Said's concern is with Orientalist discourse, the concept of a writer adopting a strategic location in relation to their text and thereby indicating their adopted position is one that applies equally to the writers under discussion. For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the act of representing another

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<sup>8</sup> Grace Ogot, *The Strange Bride* (Nairobi; Kampala; Dar es Salaam: East African Educational, 1989, repr. 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Said, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



involves the actual re-presentation of that missing consciousness or subjugated body of people.<sup>11</sup> Through their intentional re-positionings as 'other' in order to write from an alternative perspective, Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot engage in cultural politics to re-present an image of non-Western culture at odds with Western textual attitude and hegemony induced by the dominant Orientalist perspective. In *Red Strangers* Huxley assumes the Gikuyu perspective; Macgoye adopts an African point of view in her writing – a perspective clarified further in her correspondence, which, as highlighted in Chapter 1, expresses her concern for anthropological and sociological aspects of African women's positions. Kimenye makes clear that the intent behind her African perspective is to re-present African village life and write stories that are relevant to African children (see Chapter 1). Finally, Ogot in her interpretation of a traditional Luo myth in *The Strange Bride*, adopts the perspective of traditional pre-colonial Kenya, rather than colonial or postcolonial Kenya, which can be perceived as locating her as 'Other'. These writers strategically locate themselves in opposition to Orientalist discourse and to patriarchal African male discourse in order to re-present an image of the African woman that challenges representations of womanhood apparent in indigenous African folklore, myths, proverbs and contemporary texts written by African males. In so doing they engage in cultural politics through their adoption of a political stance in opposition to patriarchal structures within some societies in Africa to challenge through their texts the dominant patriarchal constructions of normative femininity.

Africa's oral tradition has ensured that folktales and myths interpellate girls concerning the skills and behaviour that ensure they are marriageable material while the boys' identity is constructed from a set of attributes that focus upon enhancing their masculinity.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, even the transgressive female child in Zirimu's 'The Hen and the Groundnuts' says 'My mother had instructed me thoroughly in traditional cookery at an early age. By the time I was thirteen I could prepare a meal worthy to be set before any chief,'<sup>13</sup> and similarly, such aspects of normative

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<sup>11</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), pp. 66 – 111.

<sup>12</sup> Evangeline Ledi Barongo, 'Silent Partners – Women in African Literature – A True Likeness? Portraits of Women in Young People's Literature', *UNESCO Courier*, July-August (1997) [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1310/is\\_1997\\_July-August/ai\\_19898053/print](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1310/is_1997_July-August/ai_19898053/print) [accessed 23 April 2008] (section 1 of 4).

<sup>13</sup> Zirimu, p. 137.



femininity and masculinity are depicted in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Abasi Kiyimba contends that 'the folktales that are told to young boys and girls constitute serious psychological and social experiences that promote male superiority and female inferiority as an incontestable status quo.'<sup>14</sup> While the oral tradition may be in decline because parents and grandparents have less time to tell stories around the fire, these ideas are still transmitted through both, "modernized" children's stories told in schools, and children's stories written by authors who represent negative images of women at odds with contemporary developments that offer them greater opportunities and an improved role in society.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, indigenous proverbs also promote and perpetuate female inequality, as discussed by Kiyimba and Isaac Ssetuba.<sup>16</sup> It is usual for the female child to be viewed in terms of the material wealth her bride-price will generate for her father when she marries, and Kiyimba highlights how this is reinforced in some proverbs:

*Akoze bikolemu, ng'omuddu azadde omulenzi*

You have done a useless thing, like a male slave who has produced a baby boy

And:

*Azaala abalungi, akaaza abanene*

He who produces beautiful ones, will be visited by big ones.<sup>17</sup>

In the first proverb, Kiyimba proposes that meaning centres on the potential for social advancement of the male slave should he produce a daughter who marries a freeborn man. In a similar manner, the second proverb can quite obviously be interpreted as signifying that beautiful girls will attract wealthy suitors and thereby increase the family's material wealth. The bride-price that the African woman can engender is also a trope that is noticeable in Davis Sebukima's novel, *A Son of Kabira* (1969), as the concern of the preacher protagonist, Nanziri, is of the wealth he will be in receipt of when he marries off his daughter. Other apparent male representations of African womanhood include the mother stereotype, which, as indicated in Chapter 1, is discussed at length by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie. Florence Stratton, however, reasons that a persistent characteristic in contemporary African male fiction is the adaptation

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<sup>14</sup>Kiyimba, p. 94.

<sup>15</sup> Barongo, section 1 of 4.

<sup>16</sup> Abasi Kiyimba, 'Gendering Social Destiny in the Proverbs of the Baganda', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17:2 (December 2005), 253 – 270, and Isaac Ssetuba, 'The Hold of Patriarchy: An Appraisal of the Ganda Proverb in the Light of Modern Gender Relations', Paper for the Cairo Gender Symposium Organised by CODESRIA/ARC Cairo 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> April 2002, 1 – 7.

<sup>17</sup> Kiyimba, 'Gendering Social Destiny in the Proverbs of the Baganda', pp. 258 & 259.



of the Mother Africa stereotype into a prostitute figure.<sup>18</sup> Such a metamorphosis is apparent in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977), where Wanja, an 'adaptation of the Gikuyu word for "mother earth"' <sup>19</sup>, transforms into a prostitute. Writers such as Okot p'Bitek, Meja Mwangi and Okello Oculi, among others, have also represented the prostitute stereotype. Bitek's *Song of Malaya* (1971) is narrated by a prostitute (*malaya* loosely translates as whore), Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* (1976) tells the story of Ben, who spends his money on prostitutes and as a consequence is left alone with his child by an ex-prostitute girlfriend, and Oculi's *Prostitute* (1968) tells how Rosa Nakintu's journeying to the city leads her into prostitution.

### The Other Woman

Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot also depict the figure of the prostitute, but unlike their African male counterparts, their representation involves presenting the prostitute anew. Therefore, in the manner of Spivak, the writers can be viewed as re-presenting an image of the prostitute whilst simultaneously standing in and speaking for this marginalised and oppressed group of African women. In Kimenye's *The Runaway Bride* (1994), Pamela, the bride to be, is re-presented as a modern African woman with 'carefully made-up face and bejewelled braids'.<sup>20</sup> However, clearly for some males, her uncommon appearance, which transgresses the boundaries relating to how a Muganda woman should look, coupled with her ability to comply with normative femininity as demonstrated by her submissive behaviour in the presence of Kazzora, sends out confusing signals which result in her being perceived, by males at least, as a prostitute figure.<sup>21</sup> Female appearance is an issue in Ogot's *The Strange Bride*. When Nyawir reappears in her birthplace Got Owaga, after a long absence, Ogot describes her in terms of her alternative look and 'unique' beauty.<sup>22</sup> News of her beauty quickly spreads and arouses the interest of the chief of Got Owaga, Were

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<sup>18</sup> Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Dorn, 'Turning Toward the World: Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*', written for ENG 631: Post-Colonial Literature at San Francisco State University (1999)

<http://www.runmuki.com/paul/writing/ngugi.html> [accessed 19 January 2008]

<sup>20</sup> Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride*, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> Kazzora attempts to rape Pamela (p.35), while Peter attempts to excuse Kazzora's behaviour on the grounds of how she projects herself.

<sup>22</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, pp. 13 & 17.



Ochak's younger son, Owiny. The bride-price that Nyawir's good looks may beget her father can be read in terms of prostitution at this point, however. Owiny states:

"My heart is yearning for this girl whose beauty the whole of Got Owaga is talking about. She's the girl I'd like to marry. Although I've not seen her personally, all my peers who have seen her have told me that she's perfect in appearance."<sup>23</sup> (SB, p.36)

In line with traditional thinking, and acting as an illustration of the Ganda proverb about beautiful women attracting the attention of suitors of higher standing, Ogot highlights how the beauty of an African woman obscures all other qualities resulting in the male re-construction of her in terms of an article to be bid for and bought. Ultimately, this state of affairs relates to the male re-positioning of the woman in line with the figure of the prostitute. This re-positioning of woman as prostitute is similarly evident in *Red Strangers*. Waseru's intention is to secure Hiuko for a second wife, but Huxley re-presents the approach to her father, Irumu, the *mundu-mugo*, in terms of prostitution.<sup>24</sup> Irumu states:

No doubt I could say to my daughter: "You are to marry my friend, Waseru; I have accepted his beer and two fat rams." Perhaps she would agree for she is a dutiful girl. But of what use would that be? Would she not run away and leave you grieving, and should I not then be obliged to return your goats? She loves another whose blood is full of youth.<sup>25</sup>

Demonstrating her compulsion to uphold European values relating to marriage, love and sexual behaviour, Huxley ignores and glosses over any material security and social standing that Hiuko would gain from marrying an elder. Hence her implication is that if Irumu did accept Waseru's proposal he would effectively be prostituting his daughter for his own gain. However, Abiero's / Victoria's father's prostituting of her in marriage to the elderly Odhiambo in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* – as it can be interpreted through European eyes – is depicted by Macgoye as a normal way of distributing 'the source of wealth and fertility in societies barely able to maintain their populations.'<sup>26</sup> With the exception of Macgoye, it is fair to state that the writers do not focus on the literal figure of the prostitute. Nevertheless, consideration of the varying re-presentations of the African woman are readily identifiable in terms of the prostitute figure and hence reveal the disparate levels of sexual etiquette maintained by the writers. From analysing her representation of Pamela in *The Runaway Bride*, and from speaking to and interviewing Kimenye, it is apparent that she is informed by

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>24</sup> The magic man.

<sup>25</sup> Elspeth Huxley, *Red Strangers* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p.145.

<sup>26</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye to Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 20 May 06.

the discourse of the contemporary, independently minded African woman, whilst Ogot highlights that female beauty is an attribute to be bid for and bought, and Macgoye draws on the discourse of indigenous African survival strategies. All three writers re-locate themselves in order to portray and present anew an image of African womanhood that challenges traditional representation. However, by contrast, while Huxley draws on the notion of African women as a source of wealth, as does Ogot, it is apparent that her re-presentation arises from a viewpoint that is informed by the discourse of Europeanised middle class values. The prostitute can thus be interpreted as signifying the writers' actual strategic location, which in the case of Huxley evidently differs from her intended location.

### African Women's Vocality

Aside from the figure of the prostitute, and as I highlighted in Chapter 1, 'African' women writers indicate their strategic location in relation to their texts and African women in particular, through their inclusion of women's vocality, the privileging of the female condition, and the creation of children's and young adult's narratives. In *The Strange Bride* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* Ogot and Macgoye both utilise African women's vocality by re-presenting characters that speak for themselves, project their own opinion, enter into business or propose new ways of doing things, and act as mediators or go-betweens within their particular community. The two works express a contrast, however, in the way the writers re-present their female characters. For example, Nyawir is verbally forthcoming when standing up for herself, as illustrated when Awino, her birth mother, challenges her about her parentage. Nyawir exclaims:

"If Opolo and Awino are not my parents, then who are my parents? Why do you despise and reject me? Do you think I'm not fit to be their child? Aaa! If that's the case, I'll not leave you. I'll carry your pot and follow you until you take me home to my parents."<sup>27</sup>

Awino is so shocked by Nyawir's forthright and transgressive manner that she is unable to comprehend 'who had taught this girl to talk like that'.<sup>28</sup> However, through her re-presentation Ogot is able to signify the level of self-determination and autonomy possessed by Nyawir. Victoria, on the other hand, realises that in order to

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<sup>27</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.15.



be able to speak for herself effectively 'she must learn to read and write'.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, with no husband to speak on her behalf since her 'marriage is gone, long ago' because she 'was redeemed, you see, with cattle', Macgoye demonstrates that the development of the ability to speak for herself is as much a survival strategy as it is an indication of her independence and subsequent empowerment as an African woman.<sup>30</sup>

Neither Victoria nor Nyawir are reticent about the business of putting forward their own opinions. Aware of the pressure on African women to marry because of the perceived need for 'some man's name to hang on to', Victoria nevertheless warns her nephew, James, 'that the line between men and women is getting rubbed out', and informs the leprosy sufferer, Atieno, that it is her belief that women have to depend upon themselves.<sup>31</sup> She says, "if you are alone, you scheme, you plan, you get a name for yourself; good or bad, it is known, it is yours. [...] The old ways are broken".<sup>32</sup> Re-presenting an African woman in this way, Macgoye challenges traditional representations, as does Ogot, who crosses the borders of protocol related to the behaviour of a new bride in relation to her mother-in-law. In *The Strange Bride* Nyawir states:

"My grandmother, being a new woman does not prevent me from working in this home. Would it really be proper for me to stay idle while you drudge until you put food before me to eat? Now that my 'sisters' have gone back, I have to help you with some light duties. [...] Let me take that metal-headed hoe to the farm for you. I knew that today you are opening the season of cultivation to all the people of Got Owaga, and you're taking the hoe to our big farm near River Mihoo."<sup>33</sup>

Nyawir's voicing of her opinion is transgressive because it challenges the conduct traditionally expected of a new bride, but her action also conceals an ulterior motive. Her opinion links inextricably to her proposal that things should be done differently in respect of the metal-headed hoe. Advocating that the community should in future labour for their rewards rather than waiting for the magic metal-headed hoe to undertake the cultivation of the land, she proposes that change is a necessary element in the advancement and progression of the community. The unspoken parallel to this particular scene in *The Strange Bride* is that a change in the traditional opinion relating to the identity of African women is required throughout Africa in order for them to be able to take up their position as equals alongside men. In contrast to

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<sup>29</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.50.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.38 and p.15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>33</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.78.

Nyawir, Victoria is re-presented as a businesswoman. As she matures, Macgoye depicts a progression in her development and hence Victoria evolves from young, innocent bride, passing through the stages of disillusioned and runaway bride, prostitute or '*malaya*', brothel owner and ultimately Nairobi shop owner – a venture that is additionally an 'excellent cover for business on the side'.<sup>34</sup> Through Victoria, an alternative empowered model of African womanhood, Macgoye delineates a character capable of standing on her own two feet and supporting herself; one that is fully aware that 'money was the coming thing, and money was useful to daughters as well as sons...'.<sup>35</sup>

In their struggle against representational politics, Macgoye and Ogot bring to the fore the oft unacknowledged and marginalized vocality of African women's daily existence through their depiction of women as mediators or go-betweens.<sup>36</sup> This enables them to re-construct a position of power for African women. In both her businesses - brothel owner-madam, and proprietor of a solid fronted shop in Nairobi<sup>37</sup> - Victoria is perfectly positioned to adopt the influential position of go-between, thereby using her vocality to procure the differing wants of many whilst situating herself advantageously so as to benefit materially and socially from her clandestine activities. In a seemingly contrasting situation, Ogot re-presents Nyawir as a mediator in her husband's community after their enforced exile due to her transgressive actions in relation to the metal-headed hoe. However, her actions do not differ that much from those of Victoria since her vocality, which is manifest in her negotiating skills, result in her acceptance back into her husband's community, thereby benefiting her both materially and socially also. Thus, when regarded as a whole, the above elements can be comprehended as 'evoking the vocality of women's everyday existence'<sup>38</sup> and so signifying Macgoye's and Ogot's chosen strategic location.

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<sup>34</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.25 and p.4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.97.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 4 for a discussion of voice as related to the notion of traditional African normative femininity.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>38</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 96.



## Privileging the Female Condition

In order to delineate the story of female existence in Africa the writers' representation of African women and their society necessarily involves the privileging of the female condition due to its traditional marginalization by African male writers as highlighted in Chapter 1. Elleke Boehmer defines the female condition as comprising 'domestic matters, the politics of intimacy, the grubby reality and drudgery of maternal experience.'<sup>39</sup> Macgoye in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* addresses these aspects. However, although Huxley's gender focus in *Red Strangers* is predominantly upon the male, it is possible to discern an interest in elements of the female condition of the Gikuyu women.

In the opening chapter of *Red Strangers* Huxley presents an image of domesticity as it relates to Gikuyu women. The narrator states:

The senior wife was bent almost double beneath a heavy load of sweet potato tops, strapped to her back with leather thongs. She was bringing them from the shamba to feed a he-goat that was fattening in the darkness of a narrow pen inside her hut. A recently circumcised daughter plodded behind with a load of firewood on her back.

Wanjiku, the younger wife, arrived a little later. She carried two big gourds, golden in the slanting sunlight, on her back. Inside them water rolled a little from side to side as she moved with bent knees, in a sort of shuffle.<sup>40</sup>

Isaac Ssetuba notes that in Ganda proverbs, whilst women are depicted as weak they are also supposed to be very hardworking,<sup>41</sup> and in this extract Huxley evidently represents the effect of aspects of the demanding daily domestic chores upon the Gikuyu woman. Furthermore, not only are the Gikuyu women the cultivators of the land and hence often loaded down with produce from the *shamba*, or water from the stream, they do all the cooking and brewing, in addition to fulfilling their maternal duties by accommodating 'babies tucked into leather slings on their backs'.<sup>42</sup> Finally, their domestic duties would not be complete if they did not attend the local markets to buy and sell garden produce and other wares. In addition, in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, although Macgoye refers only fleetingly to domesticity as it applies to women in the villages, Abiero is fully aware that when she becomes Odhiambo's wife

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>40</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.14.

<sup>41</sup> Isaac Ssetuba, 'The Hold of Patriarchy: An Appraisal of the Ganda Proverb in the Light of Modern Gender Relations', Paper for the Cairo Gender Symposium Organised by CODESRIA/ARC Cairo 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> April 2002, 1 – 7 (pp. 2 - 3).

<sup>42</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.23.



the work will be hard 'for there were two fat harvests in a year'.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, Huxley and Macgoye's focus effectively highlights parts of the African woman's existence that dominant discourses gloss over.

The more intimate gender-related affairs of the African woman is a trope that merges into the field of maternal experience and figures to some extent in both *Red Strangers* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*. Due to their adopted strategic location it is apparent that Huxley and Macgoye feel an obligation to re-present issues relating to the African woman and sex/sexuality and motherhood. However, they show a contrast in the areas of a woman's private sexual life that they address; Huxley focuses on the topic of circumcision of Gikuyu girls and the boundaries of normative sexual foreplay, while Macgoye addresses the issue of a Luo wife's adultery and her subsequent experience of childbirth. Huxley re-presents the tradition of circumcision as it affects the Gikuyu female:

The arms and legs of the candidates were pinned down by their sponsors so that they could not move, but they, like the boys, bore without flinching the pain that seared their nerves when the circumcisor, with a flick of the knife, amputated the clitoris and then, with two more slashes, the lips of flesh on either side. A convulsive shiver passed through Ambui's body when she felt the knife, but she did not cry out nor lose control of the muscles of her face. Blood spurted from the wound, and the woman circumcisor quickly plugged it with a small strip of greased leather. Then a crowd of chattering women gathered round to praise her loudly for her courage.<sup>44</sup>

In focusing openly on an operation that is rarely represented, Huxley elaborates upon and draws attention to a painful traditional rite of passage that is borne by Gikuyu girls and which signifies their transition from girlhood to womanhood. Furthermore, she delineates the boundaries of pre-marital sexual conduct, noting that penetrative sex is for married women only, but that foreplay is acceptable and expected as 'in this way young men would learn how to bring pleasure to women and would gauge also the depth of their love before goats were paid'.<sup>45</sup> However, we note that in reiterating this last sentiment, Huxley does not re-present the African woman anew but rather represents and endorses a system of African gender hierarchy that subordinates woman and relegates her to the inferior position of a commodity.

Macgoye does not dwell on Abiero's<sup>46</sup> adultery with a young fish seller, but merely highlights her situation as it appears to that character:

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<sup>43</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.11.

<sup>44</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, pp.108-109.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.105.

<sup>46</sup> Abiero becomes Victoria when she is taken to the mission hospital to give birth.



Anyone would surely know that the boy, however much smelling of fish, was to be preferred to that old, cold, fumbling Ochiambo, who perhaps, for all the evidence of the last two years, was not able to make a baby at all, and certainly never felt like doing so.<sup>47</sup>

Concentrating upon Abiero's reason for her adultery, Macgoye engages with the politics of intimacy that can affect the African woman and which are ignored and marginalised by male writers. Moreover, Abiero's sexual transgression leads Macgoye into the area of the re-presentation of the experience of childbirth and its effect upon a young girl aware that her actions leave her only one option: to run away before she gives birth and hope to find a poor man who would give them shelter.<sup>48</sup> Because of Abiero's age and inexperience, however, she leaves her husband too late, gives birth in a mission hospital and so concludes that her best chance of survival is to abscond without her child. Hence the narrator states:

The young Victoria had not specifically meant to leave the baby to die, but she would have had no chance of escaping with it. [...] and so Victoria, who ran away from the mission hospital, left it to them. She was only intent on pushing her feet forward, the unaccustomed towel chafing against her thighs, and binding the wrapper tight, tight round her breasts which the milk was just beginning to fill out.<sup>49</sup>

Macgoye hereby engages with issues that are generally considered secondary and of no importance in male representations of African womanhood. In re-presenting aspects of childbirth that only a mother has, and can experience, Macgoye empathises with the female condition and privileges issues that are traditionally left out.

### **Strategic Location and the Creation of Young Adults' Narratives**

Strategically locating herself in a position of resistance, Kimenye's re-presentation of the African woman in her children's and young adults' narratives constitutes an alternative body of works that contest the stereotypes of normative femininity apparent in dominant male discourses. As noted in Chapter 1, the construction of normative femininity by patriarchal structures in some societies in Africa situates the woman in the home. Hence marriage, domesticity, looking after the *shamba*, and child bearing/rearing is traditionally regarded as the natural order for women. Nevertheless, an examination of female characters in *The Runaway Bride*

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<sup>47</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.18.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.20.

and *Kayo's House* (1995)<sup>50</sup> illustrate how Kimenye challenges this 'natural' state of affairs.

In *The Runaway Bride* Kimenye creates Pamela as a young, strong-willed, independent modern career-oriented woman with a strong sense of self and self worth:

Still flushed with her success in *Kiss Me Kate*, Pamela seriously believed that she was sufficiently great as an actress to be welcomed into the professional theatre or even Hollywood. [...] She certainly had no intention of having Mrs Basudde ruin this glowing future. Consequently, marrying Philip was obviously out of the question.<sup>51</sup>

Pamela rejects her traditionally constructed role as a wife and Kimenye thereby strategically locates herself to represent a female character that refuses to conform to the perception of what is considered to be 'normative' African female behaviour. Unwilling to become once she is married the voiceless possession that Davies and Macgoye in Chapter 1 argue an African wife becomes, Pamela is depicted as 'speeding out of Kampala and heading for the other side of the country'.<sup>52</sup> However, as the narrative progresses Kimenye illustrates that Pamela's opinion of her own acting ability is merely a figment of her over-inflated ego, and she problematizes her identity further by re-presenting her as self-centred and shallow. Yet her career choice, combined with her rejection of all the trappings of marriage and domesticity, reveal her autonomy and demonstrate that she is far from being a representative of the traditional image of Ugandan normative femininity. Ultimately, despite the flaws in her character, when she realises that she has a natural talent as a string puppeteer, Pamela's ability to take command of a situation and suggest a workable solution to a problem that confounds the males present demonstrate that she is not the 'vain, empty-headed little fool' that her fellow puppeteer, Mike, thought she was.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, Pamela's refusal to comply with African normative femininity indicates that she does not support patriarchy's construction of woman as 'Other' and her re-presentation can be regarded as Kimenye's endeavour to destabilise the 'natural' order of the African male's hierarchical positioning in society.

This destabilising of the 'natural' order of male hierarchical positioning is also apparent in *Kayo's House*. Here Kimenye presents 'two modern girls who certainly

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<sup>50</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *Kayo's House* (London: Macmillan Educational, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride*, p.11.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.101.



didn't believe in old village stories and superstitions'.<sup>54</sup> Wanda and Jamu are sixteen-year-old schoolgirls with a natural affinity for female gossip and 'forbidden cosmetics'.<sup>55</sup> Wanda is interested in boys and has been interpellated by the reading of 'too many romantic novels' into entertaining romantic notions of marriage.<sup>56</sup> By contrast, Jamu, rather like Pamela in *The Runaway Bride*, has her eyes firmly fixed on a career. The narrator states, 'unlike Wanda who only thought of boys, Jamu hoped to work in a big hotel one day. She got good grades in school and she loved reading cookery books and collecting recipes'.<sup>57</sup> Whilst Jamu's concern is to endeavour to make a career for herself rather than to rush into marriage, domesticity and child bearing, Kimenye problematizes her identity by linking her interests to the normative female activity of cooking. This is possibly because 'Jamu was a modern girl, but still she knew the correct way to behave'.<sup>58</sup> Hence, although Jamu has fixed ideas relating to the sense of independence she will gain from having a career, she also has an awareness of the benefits of seemingly complying with aspects of normative femininity, an area that I discuss in detail later in this chapter. Kimenye likewise problematizes Wanda's identity. Wanda is represented as having a highly developed transgressive spirit, signified by her total disregard of the taboo relating to the stream. Hence, although Jamu enjoys the privacy the two girls gain when they visit 'the lonely banks of the stream',<sup>59</sup> it is Wanda that pushes the limits and encourages Jamu to transgress the boundaries along with her:

"There's no need to be frightened," said Wanda smoothly. "It won't get dark for hours yet. Besides, I don't believe a word of those stories about crocodiles. And have you seen a single snake?"  
To show that she was not afraid, Wanda started to climb through a narrow gap in the rocks. "Come on!" she shouted. "We might as well explore while we have the chance."<sup>60</sup>

Wanda's easy dismissal and transgression of borders that are enforced to safeguard her clan in particular, but also the community as a whole, highlight her independent nature and her unwillingness to submit to the suppression of her personal liberty. Furthermore, she is depicted as refusing to follow her Aunt's orders:

Not on your life, thought Wanda. She wrapped the antique pendant in a clean handkerchief and hid it behind a pile of books in the top cupboard. So what, if

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<sup>54</sup> Kimenye, *Kayo's House*, p.1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.5.

she had to lie about it? She certainly wasn't going to burn it as Aunt Nalinya had ordered.<sup>61</sup>

Kimenye thereby emphasises her autonomous spirit and a transgressive resistance that is reminiscent of the young girl in Zirimu's 'The Hen and the Groundnuts'.

### The African Woman's Life Cycle

The journey from girl to woman, incorporating the figure of the bride, is important for 'African' women writers. It represents a series of events that offer an opportunity for them to value and privilege the African female and her day-to-day existence by highlighting African women's ability to make their own decisions, to struggle, and hence to survive in societies that discriminate against them in favour of the male.

The life cycle of the African woman corresponds to specific stages and thus loosely comprises: birth, puberty, initiation, the visit, the introduction or bride-wealth ceremony, marriage, giving birth and finally, death. Indigenous cultures, for example Ganda, Gikuyu and Luo, exhibit common values, and the female child born into these cultures is disadvantaged immediately because of her gender, as discussed at length by Kiyimba, because traditional societies favour the birth of sons so that the man has a male heir.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, this 'Othering' of the African female and the privileging of the African male guarantees that from an early age all children are interpellated into what is considered normative behaviour for their gender and where they are 'naturally' located within their society. Hence, in *The Strange Bride* Ogot depicts the preparation of food and the fetching and carrying of water as duties that are carried out by the women and their female offspring, while also illustrating that a daughter can benefit her family materially when she marries. By contrast, Opii's two young sons are represented as busily involved in the masculine pursuit of trapping ants and quail.

The first important milestone encountered by the African female on her journey through life is the initiation or circumcision ceremony.<sup>63</sup> The age of initiation

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>62</sup> Kiyimba, 'Gendering Social Destiny in the Proverbs of the Baganda', pp.253 – 270, and Kiyimba, 'The Baby-Boy Syndrome in the Folktales of the Baganda', pp.94 – 108.

<sup>63</sup> See Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The River Between* (1965). The novel is preoccupied with the anxiety surrounding the act of female circumcision. It questions whether it is an oppressive patriarchal rite



may vary slightly, but Neil McGlashan notes that in general it can be taken as occurring 'after puberty but perhaps rather before full physical development, say 15'.<sup>64</sup> I have discussed Huxley's re-presentation of this traditional ceremony and the strict rules relating to sexual conduct before marriage. It should be established, however, that whilst in many African cultures the onset of puberty is comprehended as the beginning of womanhood, the initiation ceremony signals an individual's status as a recognised adult member of the group or clan.<sup>65</sup> This is a belief that is discernible in Macgoye's *The Present Moment* (1987).<sup>66</sup> The narrator informs the reader that when fetching water one morning, the Luo girl, Wairimu, knew 'she would be hot in her goatskin from shoulder to knee, but since being circumcised she wore it always modestly, mindful of her grown-up status.'<sup>67</sup> Consequently; traditional African societies protect womanhood through early marriage; a notion that is borne out and illustrated by the marriage of the Luo protagonist, Paulina, at the age of sixteen in Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*, and also in *Red Strangers* since we learn that it is only a very short period of time after their circumcision ceremonies that Muthengi agrees a bride-price for, and marries Hiuko. The notion of early marriage is also raised in *Kayo's House*. Kimenye depicts both Wanda's grandmother and her Aunt Nalinya as being married at the respective ages of fourteen and fifteen.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, when her parents and relatives make a decision to facilitate her marriage at the age of sixteen to Tofa Mulungi in an attempt to curb her transgression related to the stream and her associated visits to Ntali, her mother tells Wanda:

"It's final, you are going to marry Tofa," [...] "Early marriages are in fashion again now. It's a good thing too, it puts a stop to bad behaviour, especially if you think about the AIDS risk there is these days."<sup>69</sup>

Thus, in some circles, an early marriage is still regarded in terms of its ability to safeguard a girl's honour and to prevent any undue sexual experimentation and promiscuity. However, prior to becoming a bride, the visit occurs, which, if successful, is followed by the introduction or bride-wealth ceremony.

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practiced upon African women to ensure submission to masculine dominance or whether, in view of Christianity's construction of it as pagan, it exists as a transgressive anti-colonial rite.

<sup>64</sup> Neil McGlashan, 'Indigenous Kikuyu Education', <http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/63/250/47.pdf> [accessed 19 June 2008], pp. 47 – 57 (p. 55).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>66</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *The Present Moment* (London: Heinemann, 1987).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Kimenye, *Kayo's House*, p.16.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.15.

In traditional indigenous societies, 'the visit' refers to a suitor's visit to the parents of the girl he is intending to marry. In *The Strange Bride*, when Owiny tells his father, Were Ochak, of his intention to marry Nyawir, Ogot presents the following scene:

"Then get two or three of your age-mates so that you may go to that girl's home to see her and hear her opinion," [Were Ochak] finally said.

"Tomorrow you should send someone to go and inform her parents that after three days you'll be their guests. Then you'll come and tell me what you've found out so that we can discuss the matter again."<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, in *Kayo's House*, Wanda tells her friend, Jamu, that "'Tofa's father came to see Dad about his son marrying me!'"<sup>71</sup> The purpose of the visit is for the male to learn more about the girl's family before embarking upon the introduction, since traditional thinking revolves around the notion 'that a girl whose ancestry was not well known might create problems in a marriage'.<sup>72</sup> It also offers the girl's family the opportunity to assess the suitability of the suitor. However, Ogot and Kimenye show a difference in the way they present the reaction of the bride-to be and her family. In keeping with the philosophy of traditional pre-colonial societies whose concern is to maintain the population of the clan, Owiny's visit is regarded as the norm and hence Ogot presents Nyawir offering a prayer of thanks for Owiny's 'beauty' and 'handsome' features.<sup>73</sup> In this respect Nyawir apparently considers herself lucky, because potentially agreement could have been reached for her to be married to a much older man whom she did not find attractive. On the contrary, when the two meet, the narrator depicts the following reaction:

And, as their eyes met, each of them sighed. Nyawir even felt her lips trembling. They both knew at once that they were so much in love with each other that only death would separate them. Owiny's friends and the girls who surrounded Nyawir witnessed this immediate union of souls.<sup>74</sup>

There is an obvious immediate mutual attraction and sexual chemistry between the couple, the like of which is lacking between Abiero and Odhiambo in Macgoye's *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*. Furthermore, Nyawir's mother, Awino, cannot believe 'that her only daughter could be so lucky – to marry into such a well-to-do family'<sup>75</sup> and the subsequent material benefits are such that the sum total of the dowry

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<sup>70</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.40.

<sup>71</sup> Kimenye, *Kayo's House*, p.4.

<sup>72</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.39.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.44.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.55.



paid to Nyawir's father 'is unheard of'.<sup>76</sup> Yet while highlighting the material benefits that beautiful women traditionally attracted in pre-colonial indigenous societies, Ogot also indicates that the woman will benefit by crossing over and becoming a member of a wealthy and respected family. By contrast, in Kimenye's depiction of contemporary postcolonial Uganda, the visit of Tofa and his father is treated with more caution. Wanda's father appears concerned that she should finish her education before discussions relating to marriage are entered into, apparently showing no interest in the wealth of her prospective suitor's family. However, Jamu's perceptive comments regarding his possible focus upon an increased bride-price for Wanda, since she will be perceived as a more desirable proposition if she completes her university education, indicates that even in contemporary society the African female is still viewed in terms of her material worth to her family. Kimenye contrasts this with Wanda's reaction, which focuses upon her age and immaturity - "'But I'm only sixteen!'" Wanda exclaims<sup>77</sup> - and upon her own autonomous wishes - "'I don't want to marry anybody'"<sup>78</sup> - rather than upon Tofa's good looks.

The bride-wealth ceremony follows a successful visit. The ceremony is known as the traditional introduction or engagement ceremony from whence the African female is perceived in terms of the bride-to-be. Although, once the African girl reaches this point she is already perceived in terms of being a woman, paradoxically once she marries society no longer regards her in terms of a girl. Thus, for a Muganda girl specifically, the symbolic occasion of womanhood occurs on the morning of her wedding. The bride sits on the lap of her parents and fetches a bowl of water and a band of fire. All of these activities are symbolic of being a girl and hence this is the last occasion upon which she performs these activities. Likewise, it is common to various indigenous East African societies for some traditional dances to hold particular symbolic meaning. Girls' dances are not permitted to intimate or symbolise sexual behaviour since this type of activity is not allowed for girls. Thus, the girls' dances are non-sexual, as highlighted in *Red Strangers* by Huxley who foregrounds the maidens' dance wherein 'they imitated the motions and rhythm of grinding millet between two stones, swaying their bodies in perfect unison to the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>77</sup> Kimenye, *Kayo's House*, p.16.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.15.

swinging tune'.<sup>79</sup> On the day of the wedding, however, the women's dances symbolising sexual behaviour are performed and so Nyawir and Owiny's wedding ceremony is 'started with eating and dancing'.<sup>80</sup>

### The Figure of the Bride

Once the African female is perceived of in terms of the figure of the bride she undergoes a change of status within the community as preparations are made for the ensuing ceremony. In *The Runaway Bride* Kimenye presents a contemporary approach to Pamela's forthcoming nuptials:

As soon as the engagement was made public, Pamela was once more the centre of attention, not only during the traditional formalities, but at the parties given by close relatives on both sides. And, of course, there was the absorbing business of having gowns designed and made for herself and the bridesmaids, the selection of hymns and of floral decorations for the wedding ceremony. There was also the furnishing of the smart house which Philip had bought in an exclusive neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city.

The Press loved it. Billed widely as the wedding of the year, Pamela's impending marriage was seldom out of the news, with much space given to trivial details and guesses as to the bridal gown and accessories. Photographs of her appeared in the newspapers on a regular basis.<sup>81</sup>

This passage clearly illustrates the female as ornament, highlighting that Pamela's beauty has enabled her to attract a wealthy suitor. In *Kayo's House*, Wanda, like Pamela, is also constantly encircled by well-wishers and similarly becomes caught up in the excitement of choosing her trousseau. However, by contrast, Ogot represents a traditional introduction ceremony at which Owiny and his representatives present the agreed dowry to Nyawir's family. Like Pamela, Nyawir is the centre of attention during this ceremony:

All the time, the bride sat quietly among the other girls, without doing any work, because it was her day of showing off her dignity. Her body was beautifully decorated with chalk, *pundo*, and her hair with white cowries. (SB, p.54)

Whilst in *The Runaway Bride* there is the sense that Pamela becomes a part of, and even exudes, to a certain extent, the animated hustle and bustle that prevails, in keeping with the traditions of pre-colonial Luo society, Ogot here re-presents a bride-to-be who conforms to African normative femininity by conducting herself with a quiet stateliness and formality. Thereafter, Nyawir is hidden away in her

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<sup>79</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.146.

<sup>80</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.59.

<sup>81</sup> Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride*, p.9.



grandmother's house in order to prepare her body for the marriage ceremony. The narrator states that 'there she was fed on good food and her body was massaged with fine sesame butter because the oil of sesame made the body soft and revealed all of one's natural beauty'.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, Pamela is pampered and preened to ensure her hair is in place, her make-up is applied, and her gown is the perfect fit so she looks her finest. The main resemblance between the two brides-to-be then, is in the idea that for the period of time wherein the women are identified as brides, patriarchal society ascribes a level of importance not generally due women, and which temporarily delivers them from their normative position of oppression.

The main purpose of marriage in traditional societies is to increase the numbers of the clan, as has already been intimated. McGlashan confirms that for an African woman in these societies it was considered 'very much her public duty to bear children and multiply. On this the strength of the tribe depended and it was a very serious failing (punishable by divorce) for a woman to remain barren.'<sup>83</sup> The exclusion of a woman from her family because of her inability to produce children is an issue that Glaydah Namukasa approaches in *The Deadly Ambition* (2006).<sup>84</sup> Hence for John Bosco's housekeeper/gardener, Mrs Kamya:

John Bosco's children were the grandchildren she never had. No longer did she have to cry over her past unfruitful forty years of marriage to her late husband Kamya. The rejection she got from her in-laws, her own family and friends because she was barren. That was past! Now she had a family: a rich family with grandchildren.<sup>85</sup>

Bearing children in a marriage is of fundamental importance in African societies and consequently a childless woman is scorned, as even the birth of a female child, which can be responsible for the wife falling out of favour,<sup>86</sup> is preferable to remaining childless. Giving birth to a baby boy, however, is the traditional way for an African woman to gain power in her marriage. Kiyimba states that 'less favoured women redeem themselves by producing a baby boy'<sup>87</sup> because it 'constitutes a form of power that can paradoxically leave even the men helpless, for once a woman produces a boy in the clan, she becomes socially "untouchable."<sup>88</sup> In *Red Strangers* Huxley

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<sup>82</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.56.

<sup>83</sup> Neil McGlashan, 'Indigenous Kikuyu Education', <http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/63/250/47.pdf> [accessed 19 June 2008], pp. 47 – 57 (p. 50).

<sup>84</sup> Glaydah Namukasa, *The Deadly Ambition* (Devon: Mallory, 2006).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>86</sup> Kiyimba, 'The Baby-Boy Syndrome in the Folktales of the Baganda', p. 95.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>88</sup> Kiyimba, 'Gendering Social Destiny in the Proverbs of the Baganda', p. 256.

depicts the birth of Matu's first child by his wife, Wanja. The birth of a son is so important that:

A goat was killed and she was purified and then a feast of rejoicing was held among the men of Matu's clan. He was so delighted that he gave Wanja a small fat ram for herself to make her strong.<sup>89</sup>

Nonetheless, by obtaining status and power in this way the woman remains firmly within the construction of African normative femininity; a notion Huxley does little to dispel.

Although this is one method of achieving power, Kiguli refers to a certain resourcefulness that the construction of African normative femininity forces women to develop. This quality of being able to draw on an internal strength in order to cope with difficult situations is described in theoretical terms as nego-feminism and is a phenomenon that is confirmed by writers' re-presentation of female characters.

### Nego-Feminism and the African Woman

Echoing Kimenye in relation to the myth of passivity that envelops the African woman,<sup>90</sup> Kiguli's view is 'we [African women writers] must be brave enough to fly through 'official resistance' and claim our space to speak and write and forever reject the myth of the passive victim which in my experience African women have never been.'<sup>91</sup> Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot discredit the myth of acquiescence through their depiction of such strong female characters as, for example: Nantondo, Maria and Victoria in the *Kalasanda* books; 'the formidable Mrs Basudde'<sup>92</sup> and Pamela in *The Runaway Bride*; Lwak and Nyawir in *The Strange Bride*; Aunt Nalinya in *Kayo's House*; Paulina in *Coming to Birth*; and Victoria in *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*. Regrettably, Huxley fails to break the stereotype of the voiceless and downtrodden possession that constitutes the construction that is the African wife, unless one counts the occasion when she represents Wanjeri questioning her husband, Waseru's authority relating to Muthengi's forthcoming circumcision. Thus the text reads:

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<sup>89</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.230.

<sup>90</sup> See Chapter 1. In an unpublished interview with Elizabeth F. Oldfield on 1 August 2006, Kimenye confirmed that she had never met a downtrodden African woman in all her years of living in East Africa.

<sup>91</sup> Susan Kiguli, 'Femrite and the Woman Writer's Position in Uganda: Personal Reflections', in *Words and Worlds: African Writing, Theatre, and Society*, ed. by Katrin Brendt & Susan Arndt (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 2006), pp. 172 – 185 (p.185).

<sup>92</sup> Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride*, p.9.



“Circumcision!” his wife exclaimed. “And where will you find the fat he-goat to present to the elders, and the ox to slaughter for your son’s circumcision feast? Are ownerless goats wandering like birds here in the forest, and oxen sleeping in the trees that you burn down?”<sup>93</sup>

However, this is the sum total of Wanjeri’s transgressive outburst, and Waseru rapidly quashes her and relocates her to her normative position of oppression with an aggressive “Silence, wife!”<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, ‘African’ women writers who do represent the African woman, and issues pertinent to her, outline a ‘radical and subversive’<sup>95</sup> woman’s viewpoint because of the challenge they pose to what is constructed and perceived as the ‘natural’ order of African society and the associated construction of women’s passivity. My interest in this section is therefore to examine the extent to which Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot claim their space and reject the stereotype of the voiceless and submissive woman through their depiction of what Obioma Nnaemeka defines as an ‘African feminism [that] challenges through negotiation, accommodation, and compromise.’<sup>96</sup>

Kiguli has spoken at length on the topic of various feminisms and how they relate to the African woman, but as intimated above, her view is that African women cannot be considered as ‘completely victimised’ because one has to take account of ‘the context that constrains them’.<sup>97</sup> The condition that limits African women to which Kiguli refers is the all-encompassing structure that is patriarchy. Miria Matembe explains that patriarchal notions are so embedded within African society that to be known as a feminist aligns an African woman with Western notions that are viewed with fear and suspicion because of the potential impact upon cultures that are traditionally patriarchal. Consequently, Matembe confirms that ‘patriarchal society, fearing its downfall, designates new (progressive) ideas about gender relations as “foreign” and “not suitable” for Africans.’<sup>98</sup> Due to this shying away of African women from the (Western) label of feminism, one is directed to examine the alternative ways in which indigenous women from traditional societies find empowerment. African women therefore have to determine ways of crossing

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<sup>93</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.6.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>95</sup> Kiguli, ‘Femrite and the Woman Writer’s Position in Uganda: Personal Reflections’, p.185.

<sup>96</sup> Obioma Nnaemeka, ‘Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa’s Way’, in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29:2 (2004), 357 – 385 (p. 380).

<sup>97</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Dr Susan Kiguli, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, 17 March 2008.

<sup>98</sup> Miria Matembe, ‘I Must Call Myself a Feminist’, in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, ed. by Amandina Lihamba, Fulata L. Moyo, M.M.Mulokozi, Naomi L. Shiteni, and Saïda Yahya-Othman, (New York: Feminist Press, 2007) pp. 436 – 439 (p. 437).



patriarchally imposed boundaries in a manner that is non-threatening and hence acceptable to the dominant ideology. The whole notion of women's equality therefore has to be approached from a specifically African viewpoint that accommodates indigenous ideologies. Hence, the style of feminism currently evolving in Africa is what Nnaemeka terms nego-feminism, or 'the feminism of negotiation.'<sup>99</sup> Kiguli corroborates this when she says that negotiating is the African woman's way of being realistic about her position.<sup>100</sup> Her most effective way to attain power is not to fight, but to 'cajole, woo, and sometimes pretend you agree with the position you don't agree with to get your way.'<sup>101</sup> Hence, Kiguli states that 'I have found the whole process of living and writing within my own society is one of crossing and sometimes staying within borders.'<sup>102</sup> In assessing the space which society constructs as hers, Kiguli realises that survival and any subsequent empowerment for the African woman revolves around the ability to appear to conform to normative femininity whilst in reality compromising and negotiating situations to her advantage. This notion, however, not only applies to an educated academic such as Kiguli, but to all African women fighting the oppression that is a result of living in a patriarchal society. Consequently, Kiguli's sentiments are echoed by other African women, such as Sarah Kituyi, an uneducated co-wife; and Esther Luyimbazi, a teacher and graduate of Makerere University. Kituyi confirms that an African wife has to try and work with the domination and the systems that are in place in the society within which she lives. Hence in order for her to liberate herself she finds a job to do outside of the home, which gives her an element of independence, and when she is at home she agrees with her husband, putting forward any of her own ideas in the pleasantest of manners.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Luyimbazi states:

Men are dominant in the African society, and how we as women in such a society try to have a little to ourselves is by working hard. We do it in a very cheeky way – because society calls for that, because first of all we have to submit to our husbands, to the men, and through that submission we many times end up influencing. We talk to them gently and without using force.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Nnaemeka, p. 377.

<sup>100</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Dr Susan Kiguli.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Kiguli, 'Femrite and the Woman Writer's Position in Uganda: Personal Reflections', p.174.

<sup>103</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Sarah Kituyi, Ntinda, Kampala, Uganda, 7 April 2008. Translated by Esther Luyimbazi.

<sup>104</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Esther Luyimbazi, Ntinda, Kampala, Uganda, 7 April 2008.



Luyimbazi's 'very cheeky way' highlights how ordinary African women demonstrate a power not recognised in the male world, yet power non-the less. Her statement thus indicates that many African women are actively involved in feminism in a different, covert and subversive manner. Thus, Luyimbazi's 'cheeky way' links to the way Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot involve themselves in the liberation of African women. Matembe believes that the empowerment of any African woman serves as an example to other women,<sup>105</sup> and this philosophy can similarly be applied to African women writers' creation of women who work the system in order to gain some form of control over their lives. Reading *Kayo's House* in the light of Kiguli's, Sarah's and Esther's comments, the reader can detect Wanda's recognition of a situation that calls for shrewd handling on her part if she is to get her way with Tofa. However, because of her age and inexperience, rather than skilfully negotiating the condition in which she finds herself, as an older woman would do, she makes a somewhat unsophisticated attempt at manipulation by bursting into tears 'to show him how unhappy he had made her'.<sup>106</sup> With an older and wiser man, the tactic would have been so transparent that no doubt it would have been doomed to failure, but on this occasion 'Tofa felt so sorry for her that he gave in'.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, the lesson therein for both Wanda, and Kimenye's female readers, is that a woman can take control of a situation and manage it to her advantage. Kimenye presents Wanda using manipulation. By contrast, Kiguli does not like to think of the African woman's approach to gaining some form of personal freedom in terms of manipulation. Rather, she states:

I think it's a way of negotiating, of being realistic. Of seeing that the position you are in is precarious. So the only way to get out of it is not to fight, because if you fight society sees you as the weaker person and you will be crushed. So, can you cajole? Woo? You know? And even sometimes pretend you agree with the position you don't agree with to get your way.<sup>108</sup>

The phenomenon of nego-feminism as spoken about by this cross-section of African women is articulated and represented in the texts. Thus, Aunt Nalinya serves to illustrate the figure of the female negotiator in *Kayo's House*. When Tofa makes the initial visit to Wanda's home, her father is not prepared to become involved in the discussion of a possible marriage between the young people as he understands the

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<sup>105</sup> Miria Matembe, *Gender, Politics and Constitution Making in Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain, 2002), p.218.

<sup>106</sup> Kimenye, *Kayo's House*, p.34.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>108</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Dr Susan Kiguli.



importance and benefits of gaining an education first. Within a very short period of time, nevertheless, he apparently changes his mind and gives his approval for the wedding to go ahead. Aunt Nalinya eventually reveals her hand in the matter, though. She states:

“Please don’t blame Wanda’s father for helping to arrange to marry off Wanda while she is still so young. It was all my idea. I told him what a good idea it would be if Wanda were to marry your son. I told him I thought early marriages were a good idea, to help protect our children from the evils of modern life.”<sup>109</sup>

Recognising the potentially dangerous position Wanda is becoming entangled in, Aunt Nalinya negotiates with Wanda’s father and hence persuades him of the benefits of an early marriage in order to get her own way in the hope that it will put a stop to Wanda’s transgressive visits to the house of Kayo.

Likewise, nego-feminism is an observable fact in *The Strange Bride* and *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*. Nyawir’s desire to touch the ‘sparkling and attractive’ metal-headed hoe is so great that she resorts to negotiation in an attempt to aid her transgression and get her own way.<sup>110</sup> She opens her bid by smiling ‘softly’ and saying to her husband, “‘there’s something I want to ask you as a secret between you and me; Please swear that you’ll tell me the truth, without deceiving me in any way, and that you’ll not be unhappy with me’”.<sup>111</sup> Having wooed Owiny in this way she amazes him by openly questioning how the hoe actually tills the land of each farm. However, being too overt in her request, she misjudges the situation, and the two begin to argue. Nevertheless, like Wanda, she attempts to regain the upper hand of the situation by sulking, and declaring, “‘If you really loved me and sincerely regarded me as your wife and as a wife of this home, you wouldn’t have waited for me to ask you things about this place. You would have told me all the secrets of this village’”.<sup>112</sup> Forcing her new husband to defend his love for her in this manner, she lulls Owiny into a false sense of security by embracing him and pretending to have been joking, yet still prolonging the discussion of, and extracting information relating to, the metal-headed hoe. Finally, all her cajoling and apparent compromises result in Owiny saying, “‘Now you can ask me whatever you want to know about the metal-headed hoe and I’ll tell you’”.<sup>113</sup> Nyawir’s determination to understand the

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<sup>109</sup> Kimenye, *Kayo’s House*, p.42.

<sup>110</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.70.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.70.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p.71.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.74.



significance of the metal-headed hoe to the people of Got Owaga, and her own alternative strategic location threatens to deny a whole people from being reliant upon the hoe to provide for them. She postulates that they should take control of their own destinies. Hence, her nego-feminism enables her to engage in the process of give and take to achieve her goal.

Such instances of an overt nego-feministic attitude do not abound in Macgoye's text. Nevertheless, since as Nnaemeka states, it is an approach that is 'goal-oriented, cautious, accommodating, adaptable, and open to diverse views'<sup>114</sup>, it is an appropriate form of feministic behaviour for an African woman to adopt. Thus, Macgoye presents Victoria as expertly negotiating to her advantage the matter of her overdrawn account with the supplier, Mr. Alibhai.<sup>115</sup> Throughout the exchange she is depicted as demure and acquiescent which gives credence to her pretence that her concern is over finding and offering Mr. Alibhai a way of paying off her outstanding Kenya shillings. By contrast, she actually skilfully negotiates a way of benefiting herself financially through the covert setting up of a network to launder money for Leah Wasere and her exiled husband in London, Richard Wasere. Thus, considering the effectiveness of nego-feminism, or alternatively as Luyimbazi puts it, the 'cheeky way', and its relation to both real and fictional African women, it becomes apparent that its strength resides in a softly, softly approach that seemingly complies with patriarchal structures within some societies in Africa and the dominant ideology. The fact that it is actually a tool which African women intentionally use to challenge, express their opinion, and act in a manner that can result in them taking charge of a situation for their own benefit testifies to its significance in the quest of the African woman for independence and autonomy.

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<sup>114</sup> Nnaemeka, p. 382.

<sup>115</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.71.

## Constructing the African Woman through Language and Culture

Cultural categories are lexically expressed, not automatically, but selectively. The relation between cultural categories and language is problematic. In a particular culture a language serves as a sort of “metalanguage,” a cultural way of communicating about much, but not all, of the culture. [...] To what extent and in what ways is a language an index of its associated culture, should be of considerable interest.

(Dell Hymes)<sup>116</sup>

A culture and its language are entwined.

(Isaac Ssetuba)<sup>117</sup>

Language is but a ‘piece of the action’, and only a social action is constituted as a social practice with value and meaning only in and through the Discourse of which it is a part.

In Discourses, mind mixes with history and society; language mixes with bodies, things and tools; and the borders that disciplinary experts have created, and which they police, dissolve as we humans go about making and being made by meaning.

(James Paul Gee)<sup>118</sup>

## Describing the African Woman

In African literature traditional male-authored representations of African women are of the Mother Africa figure,<sup>119</sup> the mother/creator trope<sup>120</sup>, or of a ‘fossilised’ traditional, uncreative, rural woman left behind by, and not interested in progress and modernity.<sup>121</sup> Such representations of African women overlook the complexity of women’s actual lived existence. Furthermore, they ignore and inadvertently erase a specifically African-centred concept of ‘woman’ linked to the notion of travel and transgression that cultural philosophies reveal to reside within the terms for ‘woman’ in Luganda, Acholi (or Acoli), Dholuo and Gikuyu.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Dell Hymes, ed., *Language in Culture & Society: A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology* (New York; Evanston; London: Harper & Row, 1964) p. 167.

<sup>117</sup> Ssetuba, p. 5.

<sup>118</sup> James Paul Gee, *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxon; New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2006) p. 149 and p. 190.

<sup>119</sup> Stratton, p. 39.

<sup>120</sup> Helen Nabasuta Mugambi, ‘Intersections: Gender, Orality, Text, and Female Space in Contemporary Kiganda Radio Songs. (Women as Oral Artists).’, *Research in African Literatures*, 25:3 (1994), pp. 47 – 71, in *Expanded Academic ASAP* (Thomson Gale: University of Derby, 17 Oct., 2006) <http://find.galegroup.com/itx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=EAIM&docId=A15778851&source=gale&srcprod=EAIM&userGroupName=derby&version=1.0> [accessed 17 October 2006], pp. 1 – 21 (p. 8).

<sup>121</sup> Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994), pp. 48 – 50.

<sup>122</sup> Luganda, a Bantu language, is the major language of Uganda and is spoken by the Baganda people, Acholi is a Luo language and is spoken by the Acholi people of Northern Uganda, Dholuo is a Luo



Hymes, Ssetuba and Gee's notion of the entwining of culture and language finds clarification in the African-centred concept of woman. If, as these theorists suggest, cultural categories are expressed through language, cultural concepts embedded in the various language terms offer a way of re-interpreting the position of African women. These concepts simultaneously challenge male-authored/patriarchal representations of women whilst establishing an alternative and transgressive, yet still a specifically African woman's identity that is rooted in the history of her life cycle. Hence, although 'African' women writers' re-presentation of African women can be perceived as subverting stereotypical (male) representations, they can also be regarded as taking advantage of a chance to re-affirm traditional identities that are interlinked with the journey an African woman sets out on when she marries.

This section explores the literal meanings of 'woman' the cultural concept, and her re-positioning within her traditional cycle of life in African cultures. Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot specifically relocate themselves to re-present black women's identity in African cultures in a way that women describe themselves and that concurrently comply with, and subvert the dominant ideology. These writers consequently delineate female characters that relate directly back to cultural views of the term 'woman'. I will therefore analyse the various literal meanings of 'woman' in Luganda, Acholi, Dholuo and Gikuyu prior to discussing the re-presentation of women by 'African' women writers.

### The Visitor

In everyday usage, *mukyala* and *omukyala* in Luganda are used when referring to lady and lady/wife respectfully.<sup>123</sup> The actual meaning, however, is very different as the root, *kyala* denotes visit. By extension, the implication is that the woman occupies a very different space to that of the man because she is always perceived in Kiganda culture as a visitor. This notion is related to a linguistic terminology that reflects specific cultural ideologies whose meaning and associations reflect the African woman's life cycle, as in traditional culture it is the woman who leaves the

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language spoken by the Luo of Kenya, and Gikuyu is a Bantu language spoken by the Gikuyu of Kenya.

<sup>123</sup> The literal meaning of the Luganda terms for 'woman' were discussed and confirmed in an unpublished interview between Professor Livingstone Walusimbi, Makerere University Institute of Languages, Kampala, Uganda and Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2008.



home of her parents to cross borders and go to the homestead of her husband. There also exists a negative connotation to this literal interpretation that finds its roots in the prevalent ideology of male dominance and supremacy. Whilst the respectful way for Baganda men to refer to their wives is in terms of *omukyala*, the idea is ever present that the wife is viewed as a mere visitor and hence occupies a subordinate position to that of the male head of the homestead.

Similarly, the words for 'woman' in Acholi (*dako*) and Dholuo (*dhako*), both derive from the root *dak* which means to move, or alternatively to travel.<sup>124</sup> Its meaning is culturally very particular in that it expresses the reality of the African woman and her position. Of relevance here is Macgoye and Colomba Muriungi's reminder that in African cultures all adult women, traditionally, are married.<sup>125</sup> The woman's identity is inextricably linked to that of the visitor/traveller/stranger because it is she who must move into the unknown, entering and embracing other communities in the contact zone of the Borderlands in order to assume her role as a married woman. This situation is exemplified by the journeying to Gem that Ogot undertook to become a wife, and the subsequent re-positioning her visitor status prompted.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, Huxley, Kimenye and Macgoye are also perceived in terms of the visitor/stranger, although not necessarily in the sense of the journeying related to the indigenous African woman's/wife's journey that is embedded in the literal meaning of the select African terms for 'woman'. They therefore endeavour to re-position themselves as 'African' women writers in order to achieve a sense of permanence in the cultures they embed themselves within.<sup>127</sup>

*Mwothomka* is the term for woman in Gikuyu.<sup>128</sup> It is also sometimes employed in relation to mother and granny, but once again it is a term that has its literal meaning rooted in traditional cultural philosophy. A faithful or exact interpretation of *mwothomka* means she who comes, but as with *omukyala*, *dako* and

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<sup>124</sup> The literal meaning of *dako* (Acholi) and *dhako* (Dholuo) were discussed and confirmed in an unpublished interview between Lucy Judith Adong, translator and lecturer, Makerere University Institute of Languages, Kampala, Uganda and Elizabeth F. Oldfield on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

<sup>125</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye to Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2007. See also Colomba Muriungi, 'Breaking the chains: Female Bonding and Cultural Emancipation in an Emergent Urban Space in Kenya', *Africa Insight*, 35:2 (2005) 33 – 40, who states 'marriage in African societies has for some time been viewed as mandatory because women are expected to reproduce in order to maintain the family line' (p. 34).

<sup>126</sup> Refer to Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>127</sup> Refer to Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion on this subject.

<sup>128</sup> The literal meaning of the Gikuyu term *mwothomka* and its application was discussed and confirmed in an unpublished interview with Amos Mwensiwa-Kasule, translator, and Elizabeth F. Oldfield 26<sup>th</sup> March 2008.



*dhako* the connotation is negative because of the implication of not belonging, which constructs the Gikuyu woman as the visitor or stranger. As a result, pet names that are less offending to women, such as *shosho* (old woman) will often be used instead. Yet, like *mwothomka*, there is also a term in Luganda that exists as an alternative to *mukyala* and *omukyala* but which is considered impolite. As explained in Chapter 1, *Mukazi*, meaning woman, carries negative connotations indicative of a transgressive African woman operating outside of normative traditional female roles. Nevertheless, it concurrently signifies an independent African woman occupying a contact zone, hence, creating and inhabiting her own individual and personal space – *ekyaanya* in Luganda - and crossing boundaries to do so.<sup>129</sup> This condition is exemplified by Kimenye's mother-in-law, and the Muganda woman Lucretia, whom Kimenye based Nantondo on in the *Kalasanda* books: describing her mother-in-law as 'a law unto herself' and Lucretia as indifferent to the opinion of others, both individuals can be perceived as exhibiting a particularly strong sense of oneness.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, in denoting an African woman asserting her presence, *mukazi* combines the concepts of gender, space, and identity and so can be viewed as exhibiting positive connotations for the African feminist. However, although *mukazi* means woman, it derives from a saying that originates in folktales and that a Muganda wife may be overheard muttering to herself: '*Wooo mawe najja bw'omu kazzi!*' (Oh by the way, I came alone).<sup>131</sup> In reiterating this thought the wife is reminding herself that the position she occupies is that of outsider/visitor, emphasized and perpetuated by proverbs such as: '*agaana bba: abula obugyo* (cf. *Gaanya bba*: 1902), A woman who refuses her husband: has no place of refuge. One who does not want to submit to lawful authority, is nowhere welcome.'<sup>132</sup> As traditionally her position is a solitary one requiring absolute submission to her husband, the African woman can experience feelings of exclusion and so her identity strongly connects to notions of the visitor/stranger. However, in engaging with Zora Neale Hurston's relationship model that advocates 'going a piece of the way with them',<sup>133</sup> Davies stresses the point that:

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<sup>129</sup> See Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

<sup>130</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye, 6 July 2006.

<sup>131</sup> Michael B. Nsimbi, *Waggumbulizi* (London; New York; Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co, 1952), p.15. Translation from Luganda into English by Sam Kasule. Professor of Linguistics, Francis Katamba contests this interpretation, however, as the linguistic etymology of the term *mukazi* is at variance with the folk etymology (email, 09/06/2008).

<sup>132</sup> Ferdinand Walser, *Luganda Proverbs* (Berlin: Reimer, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>133</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, 'How it Feels to Be Colored Me', *I Love Myself When I am Laughing...A Zora Neale Hurston Reader*, ed. by Alice Walker (New York: The Feminist Press, 1979), pp. 151 – 155 (p.



going all the way home [...] means taking a route cluttered with skeletons, enslavement, new dominations, unresolved tensions and contradictions. Following many of the theories/theorists “all the way home” inevitably places me in the “homes” of people where I, as a Black woman, will have to function either as maid or exotic, silenced courtesan, but definitely not as a theoretical equal.<sup>134</sup>

This is the position the African woman finds herself to be in also, since she is culturally required to physically journey ‘all the way home’. In *Red Strangers*, the narrator states ‘Hiuko crossed the river of marriage spanned by no bridge of returning’.<sup>135</sup> Taking into account this view of marriage, coupled with the linguistic construction of the cultural category African woman, it is evident that at the point of marriage when the African female is culturally viewed as becoming a ‘woman’, she journeys much farther than ‘a piece of the way’ since she must cross over to the husband’s space. However, whilst the African woman is seen to physically go all the way to her husband’s homestead, she can occupy an alternative emotional and psychological space by only going a piece of the way because of the knowledge that she must protect her own interests and fend for herself. Consequently, her survival instinct upholds aspects of Fanon’s theorization of native survival strategies (discussed earlier in Chapter 1), in that she appears to play the game and conform.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, because the African woman’s position in the world is denoted in terms of visitor/stranger/foreigner she simultaneously maintains a distance from the homestead when she experiences any differences. Dissolving borders as they re-position and re-make themselves in order to find a space that is meaningful to them as women, the combined notions of travel, visitor/stranger and re-positionings are apparent in women characters created by Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot.

### Dissolving the Borders

Gee states, ‘the borders that disciplinary experts have created, [...] they police’. In the context of this study, however, experts are displaced and replaced by culture, patriarchy and society since they are the structures that impose and reinforce the borders that are constructed to limit and suppress the African woman. Hence,

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152), in Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994; repr. 2002), p. 38 & p. 46.

<sup>134</sup> Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994; repr. 2002), p. 46.

<sup>135</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.151.

<sup>136</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1965), p. 39.



whilst African women 'go about making and being made by meaning'<sup>137</sup> I am interested to determine the extent to which borders constructed by the dominant ideologies are dissolved by 'African' women writers' re-presentation of African female characters.

The characters of Hiuko, Nyawir, Victoria and Pamela all cross-geographical borders on their journey to become women and are hence viewed in terms of the visitor/stranger. In *Red Strangers* Hiuko crosses over to the homestead of her husband and in so doing enters into womanhood. Upon occupation of her ascribed space in her new, thatched hut, however, Hiuko's reaction is unfamiliar to a Western audience. The narrator states:

Here she lay for four days, face-down on the bed, moaning and weeping and chanting melancholy songs which extolled the virtues of the clan from whose friendly shelter she had been snatched away.<sup>138</sup>

Huxley hereby represents Hiuko's symbolic actions that follow her physical crossing over to the homestead of her husband. Her behaviour is indicative of her sorrow at leaving her childhood home, but additionally bears witness to her recognition of feelings of alienation and not belonging to the clan into which she has married and will remain. Huxley's representation is very short, focusing briefly only on the period wherein Hiuko is regarded as the figure of the bride. Nevertheless, it is still possible to get a sense of the re-positioning Hiuko undergoes. After her period of mourning for the loss of her childhood and family, Hiuko is required to collect herself sufficiently to enter the next phase of her journey as a Gikuyu woman. Hence:

After four days Wanjeri [her mother-in-law] entered her hut for the first time, bringing a calabash of fat. The bride smeared the fat over her head and, attended by Ambui, emerged from the hut to pay a short visit to her own mother. That night she returned and slept for the first time with her husband.<sup>139</sup>

Huxley delineates Hiuko as re-making herself in order to occupy the space of African wife as prescribed by Gikuyu culture. In returning to her mother as a bride, however, Hiuko is now perceived in terms of the visitor/traveller in her childhood home also, which re-positions her in the Third Space between her former home and identity, and her new home and identity as a wife. Unfortunately Huxley's representation of Hiuko does not extend to the illustration of differences experienced once she has physically crossed over and gone all the way to her husband's homestead. Thus, through the

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<sup>137</sup> Gee, p.190.

<sup>138</sup> Huxley, *Red Strangers*, p.150.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.150.

character of Hiuko, Huxley merely depicts an African woman crossing geographical boundaries in compliance with cultural expectations. In so doing she re-affirms a traditional identity intertwined with the notion of travel. Thus, she fails to re-present Hiuko's occupation of a distinct emotional space that could suggest a disparate transgressive identity and thereby overlooks the opportunity to delineate an African woman simultaneously conforming to and challenging the dominant ideology. Hence, rather than depicting a character that in some manner transgresses her circumscribed boundaries by simply going a piece of the way, Hiuko is perceived as going all the way home by appearing to wholly conform to Gikuyu cultural expectations.

By contrast, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot present African women characters that feel unable to occupy the space culture constructs for them. Although they all cross geographical boundaries in keeping with the literal meaning of the various African language terms for woman, psychologically they refuse to be taken over, or to go all the way home. Instead, the characters of Nyawir, Victoria and Pamela prefer to retain their own identity and so partake in a form of transgression not encompassed by the cultural category, African woman. Their refusal to be taken over by the space that dominant ideology constructs as acceptable and appropriate therefore manifests itself in the form of a single-mindedness that results either in an overt refusal to conform, or in the woman character leaving the relationship to make her own way in the world.

In Ogot's *The Strange Bride*, Nyawir, the beautiful wife of Owiny, embodies the notion of 'stranger', the binary opposite of 'indigenous'. Not only is she perceived as a stranger/visitor in terms of her status as a married woman (which entails her movement to an unknown community), but also in terms of her mysterious past; great and spellbinding beauty; and refusal to adopt an identity that conforms to patriarchal cultural expectations. The latter would give the outward illusion of being indigenous or belonging to her husband's clan.

Nyawir's distinctive appearance, due to wearing her hair 'combed out in long strands, decorated with cowries', and her great beauty, ensure that she stands out from all the other women.<sup>140</sup> As the narrator says:

Everyone marvelled at her lovely features. The slim-waisted girl was exceptionally brown, and her body was proportionally built. She had beautifully-

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<sup>140</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.6.



shaped legs, a neck with natural rings, and a natural gap between the front two of her snow-white teeth.<sup>141</sup>

With her slim waist, shapely brown legs, natural rings round her neck and gap between ultra white teeth, Nyawir is apparently in possession of all the qualities that are deemed attractive in a woman in Kenya and many other African communities. The people of Got Owaga therefore regard her as 'the queen of beauty'.<sup>142</sup> Kiyimba states that 'beauty brings great advantages to girls by way of securing them automatic attention from the highest quarters in society.'<sup>143</sup> This is apparent in Ogot's tale, as Nyawir's beauty attracts the attention of Owiny, the second son of the chief of Got Owaga. Owiny is determined to marry Nyawir, despite his father's suggestion that he 'find a girl whose lineage is known to everyone'.<sup>144</sup> Thus Nyawir's mysterious background remains undiscovered because her beauty overshadows the custom of looking into the family and personal history of the prospective bride. Therefore, it is initially Nyawir's baby-soft glowing skin, the result of 'good food' and rubbing 'sesame butter' over her body, and her unique hairstyle, worn long and decorated with cowries - that defines her in terms of the stranger/visitor in her new homestead rather than her background.<sup>145</sup> This is of concern to her mother, though, as she recognises that 'her unique hairstyle made her look like a stranger among the people of Got Owaga'.<sup>146</sup> Yet Nyawir's refusal to conform and wear her hair cropped short in the style of the other girls because, she reveals, 'my hair style, with the cowrie decorations has become part of my nature', not only contravenes traditional cultural expectations, but also highlights her resistance to the imposition of new identities and anticipates her later and ultimate transgression.<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, Kiyimba confirms that suitors 'are blinded by beauty', an idea that finds meaning in *The Strange Bride*.<sup>148</sup> This is highlighted by the dowry demands agreed to – 'ten big baskets of sorgum two times and five more on top'.<sup>149</sup> In addition, the fact that it is only her mother-in-law, Lwak, who 'was disturbed by the fact that Owiny, the groom, or Opii, her elder son, and even his wife, Achola, only focussed on the girl's beauty but did

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>143</sup> Kiyimba, 'The Baby-Boy Syndrome in the Folktales of the Baganda', p. 103.

<sup>144</sup> Ogot., *The Strange Bride*, p.39.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>148</sup> Kiyimba, 'The Baby-Boy Syndrome in the Folktales of the Baganda', p. 103.

<sup>149</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.47.

not see the ominous aspect of her nature' underlines this idea.<sup>150</sup> Ogot's representation of Lwak's perception of Nyawir's beauty as some sort of a source of unrecognised menace to those around her is also highlighted by Kiyimba as a trope that occurs in various proverbs advising about the risks of chasing beautiful women.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, although the majority of those who encounter Nyawir's beauty are overwhelmed, and distracted from reasoning in matters related to her, she is still labelled as a 'foreigner', even by her own father, because of her 'beauty and strange hair style', her mysterious past, and her refusal to conform.<sup>152</sup> By contrast, Nyawir does not view herself as foreign because of these differences. Rather she merely regards them as meaningful aspects that are embedded within her very individual nature. While Nyawir is still a girl and living with her parents, her 'foreignness' is not highlighted as a specific issue, other than to raise concerns over the trend of other girls to copy her, thus 'abandoning their customs' in the process.<sup>153</sup> However, once Nyawir is married and becomes a part of Owiny's community, her 'foreignness' in relation to her appearance, background, and refusal to conform to the dominant ideology is problematized. This is because acknowledgement of the notion of her 'foreign' identity emphasises the failure of her adopted community to fully integrate and re-position her to occupy the space culturally ascribed to her.

Having gone all the way home in relation to the first, geographical boundary, Nyawir refuses to suppress her own identity and autonomy. This is revealed in her obsession with a subject sacred to the community: the metal-headed hoe that automatically tills the land for the whole of Got Owaga, thereby relieving the people of all work required to cultivate their fields. Wishing to alter this custom for the sake of progress and for the benefit of all the villages/villagers in Got Owaga, Nyawir attempts to till the soil with the charmed metal-headed hoe and thereby makes it lose its power. The community regard this contravention of the god, Were Nyakalaga's, commandments as the ultimate transgressive act. Having demonstrated that she is unable to conform to cultural expectations, Ogot creates a bride whose behaviour emphasises an identity that finds meaning in the notion of the visitor/stranger. However, Kiyimba states that 'the beautiful girl is [...] stigmatised as a potential

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p.63.

<sup>151</sup> Abasi Kiyimba, 'Gendering Social Destiny in the Proverbs of the Baganda', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 17:2 (December 2005), 253 – 270 (p. 263).

<sup>152</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, p.22.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p.35.



source of danger, and is the personification of evil.’<sup>154</sup> This is apparent in *The Strange Bride* since Lwak, Nyawir’s mother-in-law, voices her concerns regarding the threat she believes that Nyawir poses to her community even prior to her marriage,<sup>155</sup> and immediately Nyawir is known to have broken the charmed hoe she is re-constructed by Owiny’s community as ‘a witch’, ‘that evil bride’, ‘evil daughter-in-law’ and so on.<sup>156</sup> However, although Ogot highlights that the community re-construct her in terms of the signification of their perceived transgression, Nyawir’s actions also signify her deliberate dissolution of borders in her attempt to re-position and re-construct herself in terms of her own autonomous identity.

By contrast to Nyawir, Victoria in Macgoye’s *Victoria and Murder in Majengo* breaks the African woman’s cycle by leaving her marriage. At the age of fifteen, Victoria, who was then known as Abiero, is married off because ‘there were hungry days’ in her childhood home.<sup>157</sup> Abiero travels to Gem to marry an ‘old man’ and become ‘house junior’ and ‘co-wife’ to Anyango who is regarded as her cousin.<sup>158</sup> Initially flattered by the length of time taken to resolve the dowry negotiations, Abiero completes her geographical journeying from her childhood home to that of her husband, as required by normative cultural expectations, and enters into womanhood. However, the two years she spends with her husband, whom she describes as ‘that old, cold, fumbling Ochiambo’ demonstrate to her that she is unable to commit to occupying the space traditional culture constructs for her.<sup>159</sup> Consequently, psychologically she only goes a part of the way and proceeds to transgress the boundaries of sexual behaviour. For instance, she embarks on a liaison, which results in her pregnancy, with a ‘tall and thin and fair-skinned’ Luo-speaking boy from the islands, who is noticeable for the fact that he owned a bicycle and ‘pedalled from market to market with lake fish to sell’.<sup>160</sup> In East African indigenous cultures like Ganda and Luo, shared values exist. Hence Abiero can be interpreted as living up to the following proverb:

*Omuwala ow'amalala, bw'akula azaala emisango.*  
A girl of careless behaviour causes problems when she grows up.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Kiyimba, ‘The Baby-Boy Syndrome in the Folktales of the Baganda’, p. 103.

<sup>155</sup> Ogot, *The Strange Bride*, pp.36-38.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.97, p.99 and p.101.

<sup>157</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.10.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.10, p.18 and p.10.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>161</sup> Kiyimba, ‘Gendering Social Destiny in the Proverbs of the Baganda’, p. 261.



Careless behaviour comprises arrogance of the type that causes a girl to have a high opinion of herself resulting in her going out with boys, in addition to loose morals leading to transgression in matters related to expected sexual conduct. Macgoye's representation of Abiero's sexual misconduct and consequent fear of reprisal for her transgression can thus be interpreted as reinforcing East African oral literature's prejudicial and discriminatory construction of women. When her delivery time is near, Abiero takes the autonomous decision to break down the existing boundaries and leave her husband's homestead. Giving birth to her baby in a missionary hospital, the narrator states that 'on the day of her confinement she became Victoria'.<sup>162</sup> In changing her name, Abiero loses her traditional tribal identity and withdraws from her married life. Choosing a European name that effectively suggests a stranger/foreigner with a contemporary identity, Abiero re-invents herself as Victoria and runs away, leaving her baby behind to ensure the best possible chance of starting a new life.

Victoria's new life involves her travelling to Kisumu and re-configuring her identity to become a prostitute in a brothel, and eventually the madam of the establishment, rather than allow her identity to be taken over and oppressed by traditional cultural expectations that construct a space for her that she is unwilling to occupy. In re-presenting the figure of the prostitute Macgoye echoes the autonomous prostitute figure of Wanjia in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*. Although wa Thiong'o's representation of the prostitute is of a strong and powerful female figure that leads the revolution and liberates the village, she is still stereotyped in that she is represented as degraded and branded as an unworthy woman, as highlighted in Chapter 2.<sup>163</sup> Macgoye presents Victoria as travelling to Kisumu and drifting into prostitution. Initially it appears that Victoria's reason for abandoning her child and travelling to town is to gain her freedom because she perceives that the place where you get cloth, shoes, books, and have a court case heard, will offer more opportunities to re-make her identity. Discussing the 'foreign' nature of the identity of the prostitute shortly after her initiation into the transgressive world of prostitution with the brothel madam, Sara Chelagat, Victoria says:

that that day had been a turning-point in her life (sic). That day she had not only embarked upon a career, she had also begun to live with complete deliberation.

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<sup>162</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.19.

<sup>163</sup> Bonnie Roos, 'Re-Historicizing the Conflicted Figure of Woman in Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood*', *Research in African Literatures*, 35:4 (Summer 2002) pp. 154-170, (p. 162).



Nothing that happened to her after that was completely independent of her own free will. Abiero's surviving spirit was laid. Victoria took charge.<sup>164</sup>

Significantly, not everyone has the luxury of being able to choose whether or not to enter into prostitution, as demonstrated by the rent boys who drift into child prostitution and paedophilia in Kimenye's *Prettyboy, Beware* (1997). And although Victoria also initially drifts into contact with prostitution, in choosing to accept that as her new autonomous role, she lays to rest her former identity of Abiero, the Luo woman and wife.

In choosing to become a prostitute Victoria can be viewed in terms of both transgressing normative understandings of the African woman and simultaneously embodying the wanderer/stranger notion embedded in the literal understanding of the Dholuo term, *dhako*, because of her 'foreign' behaviour. Victoria commits a major transgression of cultural boundaries relating to the African woman, since promiscuity is discouraged, as evidenced by the proverb *Omuwala ow'amalala*, above. Macgoye's re-construction is significant in the light of Colomba Muriungi's statement, relating to African male writers' stereotyping of the prostitute, that: 'Many of the studies done on prostitution in African literature have tended to place the prostitute within a sociological framework that sees her as morally degenerate.'<sup>165</sup> Macgoye presents Victoria's prostituting of her self as 'natural', while drawing attention to the fact that Victoria discovers that 'to be wanted was a pleasure'.<sup>166</sup>

Muriungi states:

Movement into the urban space aids women in discovering their potential. It allows them to break away from certain traditional roles and networks to forge new and more emancipatory networks outside the watchful eyes of the family and traditional community.<sup>167</sup>

Like Nyawir in *The Strange Bride*, Victoria deliberately breaks down boundaries relating to the space normatively constructed for her. By contrast, however, Victoria achieves her agency by leaving a marriage which she finds unfulfilling. In so doing, she discovers that prostitution allows her a way of asserting her independence and improving her life to the extent that she 'learn[s] to live half like a man' by earning her own money.<sup>168</sup> Consequently, 'to draw from Sara the cash for a new dress, a

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<sup>164</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.27.

<sup>165</sup> Colomba Muriungi, 'Breaking the Chains: Female Bonding and Cultural Emancipation in an Emergent Urban Space in Kenya', *Africa Insight*, 35:2 (June 2005), 33 – 40 (p. 33).

<sup>166</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.24.

<sup>167</sup> Muriungi, p. 34.

<sup>168</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.27.

bottle of hair-oil, ear-rings, was a delight'.<sup>169</sup> This is something that as the wife Abiero in the village, Victoria would not have experienced. Such frivolities have no place in the life of an African village woman, whose duty it is to work hard in the home and in the fields, and bear and rear the children who are always perceived as belonging to the husband.

With the passage of time, the transgressive act of selling her body ultimately enables Victoria to re-fashion herself into an extremely powerful woman. With regard to the prostitution business she comes to the realisation that:

there was something more in it, which she now believed she had always suspected. It did not end here and now with a sudden climax, a strenuous failure or the wasteful compensatory purchase of a round of beer. It hinged onto the public sphere, the interest and safety of the state (which she had at last come to envisage as a strong and glamorous network of successful persons among whom the rest were enmeshed). In this house, in this room, there was something other than the body which was to be desired and used, and if it was important to the establishment to draw its net a little close round the bigger fish, so it was also important to the fish to loosen the net a little: someone who needed to be in the dark would gladly pay the cost of a broken lamp.<sup>170</sup>

Macgoye hereby re-presents a way of perceiving a figure traditionally constructed as an outcast, in a manner not commonly encountered in African literature, as can be demonstrated by a comparison with Kimenye's *Kalasanda* texts where, as is raised in Chapter 2, the trope of the prostitute also figures. Maria, another strong, powerful woman is, by contrast to Victoria, presented as 'the unchallenged beauty of Kalasanda' with a 'brood' of children.<sup>171</sup> For the benefit of the men of the village, Maria flashes her 'dazzling smile' and engages in 'much giggling and fluttering of eyelashes'.<sup>172</sup> Of Maria, the narrator states:

she harboured no illusions. It might be pleasant if a church marriage between herself and Antoni took place, but with the innate indolence of a child of the moment, Maria seldom gazed into the future, just as she seldom looked back into the past. To her, this relationship with Antoni had so far proved one of the more rewarding, in the literal sense, experiences of her life. She was happy in it, and acknowledged its advantages without consciously seeking to prolong them indefinitely.<sup>173</sup>

The 'foreign' behaviour of Victoria and Maria contributes to the strength of both women. However, the way Macgoye and Kimenye re-fashion characters that 'participate in consumer culture as an autonomous subject' differ greatly as is evident

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., pp.48-49.

<sup>171</sup> Kimenye, *Kalasanda Revisited*, p.22 and p.58.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p.60 and p.61.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p.63.



from the above extracts.<sup>174</sup> Both Maria and Victoria transgress boundaries of traditional patriarchal culture and commonly perceived decency and morality, and neither has a permanent man in their lives. The difference between Victoria and Maria, however, is that Maria lives for the moment. As owner of the 'Happy Bar', she has financial independence, and therefore feels confident to choose a man at will, depending upon the benefits the relationship can offer her. Hence the benchmark Maria employs as a measure of the usefulness and permanence of her relationships with men is whether or not they are advantageous to her in some manner, whether it be materially, as in the case of her association with Anthony, or in some other way not. By contrast, Macgoye re-constructs a female figure that, although a prostitute, demonstrates an identity that continues to develop and evolve with the passage of time. Rather than transforming her identity from Abiero the wife to Victoria the prostitute and then remaining static, she continues to 'cut herself off from the old identities' as she travels on her journey through the woman's life cycle.<sup>175</sup> Consequently, in her subsequent role as owner of 'Victoria's or Mama Victoria's', as Sara's old establishment comes to be known, she re-constructs her woman's space to the point where she 'had been the eyes and ears of a whole urban district and had great men briefly at her beck and call'.<sup>176</sup> As madam of 'Mama Victoria's', Victoria may be regarded by the dominant cultural ideology as an outsider and an outcast because of her connection to prostitution, yet she is also in a position that requires her utmost discretion since her position entails the extraction, processing and merging of privileged information:

Many exact questions had to be stored up. But this was not all: one piece of information could score off another. A. wanted to know where B. was investing his money so as to prove that he was taking bribes: B. on the other hand wanted an interview with the planning section to search for further channels of investment. X was under suspicion for forming a group that might turn into a new political party, but X. also wanted to know how far Y. was loyal to his superiors before approaching him.<sup>177</sup>

Victoria has thus journeyed to the extent that her identity is as much linked to that of a negotiator and politician as to a prostitute, empowering her and substantiating her

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<sup>174</sup> Kimberley Roberts, 'The Clothes Make the Woman: The Symbolics of Prostitution in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 16:1 (Spring, 1997), 107-139 (p.108).

<sup>175</sup> Macgoye, *Victoria and Murder in Majengo*, p.59.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p.45 and p.58.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.49.



belief that 'the more men, the more you have to depend on yourself'.<sup>178</sup> Accordingly, because of her re-positioning, Victoria is able to work hard to finally become a Nairobi shop owner and so turn the transgressive wandering spirit in her to her own advantage.

Unlike Hiuko, Nyawir and Victoria, Pamela in *The Runaway Bride* fails to actually participate in her own marriage ceremony at the cathedral. This is despite the complex arrangements ensuring that on her wedding day classical music is playing inside the Anglican Church where the groom, guests, choir, bridesmaids and bishop await her. Pamela realises her marriage to Philip Basudde would be 'a terrible mistake' and thus commits the transgressive act of leaving her prospective husband standing at the altar.<sup>179</sup> Although Pamela is ultimately unable to journey 'all the way home' with Philip, thereby crossing over to his homestead to become a wife, she still crosses geographical borders by running away. Nevertheless, leaving in search of a space that enables her to retain the identity she has constructed for herself ensures that Pamela can still be perceived in terms of the visitor/stranger. The difference between being viewed as the visitor/stranger as a wife and as a runaway bride, however, is that in running away, Pamela is in charge of her own destiny and is able to determine the conditions surrounding her new identity.

When Pamela met Philip she was viewed as 'the country's undisputed queen of the theatre' and he treated her as 'a star'.<sup>180</sup> However, in choosing to work in the theatre, Pamela re-constructs a specific space and an autonomous identity for herself that challenges the thinking related to the traditional space ascribed to the African woman by dominant ideologies. Sam Kasule states that, 'the practice of performance [carries] a stigma, to be avoided by "decent" women.'<sup>181</sup> Such thinking is upheld in particular, by the older generation in Uganda. Thus, Pamela's prospective mother-in-law, Mrs Basudde, unsurprisingly 'considered it indecent for any girl to flaunt herself on the stage and be written about in newspapers'.<sup>182</sup> Performing on stage is not considered normative feminine behaviour for an African woman, and Kasule confirms that traditionally performers are not held in high regard because of what is perceived as their fondness for an easy life coupled with their wandering (transgressive)

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>179</sup> Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride*, p.7.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>181</sup> Sam Kasule, 'Your Experience is Your Only Truth': Women in Theatre', Unpublished Conference Paper (2007) p. 2 of 19.

<sup>182</sup> Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride*, p.10.



spirit.<sup>183</sup> Nevertheless, Kimenye presents in Pamela a modern woman, or *mukazi*, who, because of her insistence on pursuing her own goals on her own terms, exhibits a keen sense of oneness.

Initially Pamela believes that she does not have a choice and that she must conform to the dominant ideology and marry Philip, particularly as 'she was caught up in the relentless rituals that were part of a modern, society wedding'.<sup>184</sup> Feeling that she has let proceedings advance to a point of no return, Pamela thinks (no doubt like many African women), that she will have to go through with the marriage and 'hope to make the best of it'.<sup>185</sup> However, the narrator states:

Mrs Basudde's appearance had the effect of shaking her out of her mood of meek resignation. The woman's masterful interference was all that was needed to prove conclusively that marrying into the Basudde family would be the greatest mistake of her life.<sup>186</sup>

The timely arrival of Mrs Basudde therefore jolts Pamela out of her spiritless acceptance of her lot as an African wife to Philip, and spurs her on to take control of her life and identity as a woman. Although the notion of the African woman/wife as visitor/stranger is embedded in the select African terms for 'woman', Pamela is not prepared to occupy the wife's assigned space as a stranger within her husband's family. Kiyimba raises the notion of 'the plight of the girl as an outsider in both her father's and her husband's families'.<sup>187</sup> Many African cultures construct girls as the outsider, and in respect of the oppressive relationship Pamela was about to enter into with Philip and his family, she recognises that she would always be perceived as the outsider when she crossed over and entered into the Basudde family. Through her presentation of Pamela, however, Kimenye suggests that woman can root herself and takes root wherever she goes, just as Pamela takes root with the Masuka Puppet Theatre, which she joins up with after she jilts Philip. Integrating herself into her new surroundings, Pamela demonstrates that in spite of her status as a *mukazi*, which allows for the incorporation of her autonomy and wandering spirit, she is still able to behave as tradition dictates when required. Hence:

she sank to her knees before Kazzora. [...] The headman blinked at the sight of her. The whole point of the evening's gathering seemed to have escaped his

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<sup>183</sup> Kasule, p.2.

<sup>184</sup> Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride*, p.13.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>187</sup> Kiyimba, 'Gendering Social Destiny in the Proverbs of the Baganda: Reflections on Boys and Girls becoming Men and Women', p.258.

memory. However, he quickly recovered and returned her smile as, in a clear voice, Pamela thanked him on behalf of the Masuka Puppet Theatre for his progressive and enlightening speech [...]. Amid cheers, she led him to the carved chair, and knelt humbly beside him.<sup>188</sup>

By becoming rapidly embedded within her own very particular space, Pamela is confident enough about her own sense of self to be able to perform a traditionally submissive female act of conduct without compromising her independence. Kiguli likewise supports Kimenye's re-presentation of this act of female submission. She states:

I don't like kneeling down, it messes your clothes, but sometimes you think, "Right, the best way to get things out of that circle is if I go and play the traditional role." And I go and I play the traditional role and I get what I want and I get on with life.<sup>189</sup>

In this manner, both Kiguli and Kimenye's character, Pamela, find a way to deal with the space they occupy and learn how to survive in it whilst waiting for the revolution in terms of the African woman's identity to come. Nevertheless, in *The Runaway Bride* there is a sense that because Pamela occupies a transgressive and alien space in relation to most Kiganda women, she is readily reconstructed and regarded as a prostitute figure by the headman, Kazzora:

When at last she did sink into a sort of stupor, she was annoyed to be brought out of it by a discreet rapping at the door of the store.  
"Who is it?" she muttered angrily, fumbling for the matches and candle on the floor beside her.  
There was no answer, but the rapping continued [...].  
"Who is it?" she repeated.  
"It's me – Kazzora," came the quiet reply.  
[...]  
She opened the door and said, "Yes?"  
Kazzora sidled into the store and stood close to her. He, too, carried a candle.  
"I thought you might be lonely," he said, lunging at Pamela with his free hand.<sup>190</sup>

Kimenye in this demonstrates that as a single unmarried woman traveller/stranger, Pamela is regarded as an easy and acceptable target for sexual harassment and abuse. Likewise, because of her own immodest opinion of her acting talents Pamela invites both those around her and the reader to formulate an opinion of her 'as a vain, empty-headed little fool', as highlighted earlier in this chapter.<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, after

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<sup>188</sup> Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride*, p.22.

<sup>189</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Dr Susan Kiguli.

<sup>190</sup> Kimenye, *The Runaway Bride*, pp.34-35.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p.101.



discovering her natural skill with string puppets, Pamela's behaviour is very atypical for an African woman. Speaking to the puppeteers, Mike and Peter, Pamela says:

"Don't be so defeatist. There's plenty of time to raise money. If we take more trouble over our shows – spend time on rehearsals and be a bit more imaginative with the scenery – we could easily get bookings at most first-class hotels. And what about the advertising industry? I can think of several firms who might be keen to use our puppets in their television adverts. It goes without saying that Salome would be an instant success in any TV advert."<sup>192</sup>

In taking charge of the future and marketing of the Masuka Puppet Theatre Pamela demonstrates her leadership qualities and thereby her character as a stranger. She is ultimately re-presented by Kimenye as an African woman asserting her presence in a space she has re-constructed as fitting for her re-created autonomous identity.

The ideology of male dominance and supremacy that constructs African normative feminine behaviour, denies the right of a woman 'to play as well as anybody else.' Yet, through their attempts to re-locate themselves and re-present the African woman 'Other', Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot challenge and transgress the boundaries of normative femininity. Huxley, however, is not preoccupied with the female condition, which ultimately affects the success of her re-positioning in order to write from the Gikuyu perspective as it relates to the women of this group of people. Hence, whilst she delineates a fleeting picture of the Gikuyu woman and rituals that affect her throughout her lifecycle, it is notable that she does not really present the African woman anew and hence is unable to overcome the Eurocentricism of her generation. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 2, her attempt to put forward a perspective at odds with the dominant Western discourse should not be dismissed lightly, since when viewed as a product of her time it cannot be denied that she does transgress boundaries relating to accepted Western cultural boundaries by re-positioning herself as 'Other' in her attempt to speak on behalf of another.

Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot strategically locate themselves in opposition to the dominant patriarchal discourse, in so doing challenging representations of African womanhood in traditional indigenous orature and male-authored traditional and contemporary texts. Furthermore, Kimenye's young adults' texts constitute a significant alteration of the subjects mostly represented in traditional male-authored texts, thereby challenging stereotypes of normative femininity and strategically

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p.101.

locating her in a position of resistance in relation to African male patriarchal discourse. The writers are successful in their attempted re-location because of their re-presentation of women, including the prostitute figure, the act of giving a voice to African female characters and bearing witness to the phenomenon of nego-feminism, and privileging aspects of the woman's daily existence and her life cycle.

Lastly, I highlighted that traditional cultural philosophies demonstrate that the notion of travel and transgression are inherent within the meaning of the Luganda, Acholi, Dholuo and Gikuyu terms for 'woman' and how the writers' re-presentations of female characters can thus be related directly back to the literal meanings of the various terms for 'woman'.



## 4: Delineating the Position of African Women

### Part One

#### Voice

In Sylvia Tamale's analysis of gender and parliamentary politics in Uganda, *When Hens Begin to Crow*, she writes:

Female chickens normally do not crow. At least popular mythology claims that they cannot. Hence, in many African cultures a crowing hen is considered an omen of bad tidings that must be expiated through the immediate slaughter of the offending bird.<sup>1</sup>

Tamale's metaphor intimates that the position of women in many African cultures is synonymous with that of the female chicken. This is because when Ugandan/African women attempted to transgress patriarchal boundaries by audibly and overtly moving out of their normative silent space into arenas such as politics, TV and radio broadcasting, feminist activities, and even writing, they are publicly criticized for their conceived misdemeanour. Tamale's comparison is therefore not only an indicator of the privileging of the male cockerel, and by extension the African male, whose normative duty it is to assume a position of power and give reign to his voice by crowing, but also indicates the importance – in the African context – of a hen crowing. Thus, when females begin crossing over into what African society constructs as male landscape, it is considered to be a bad omen: so much so that the most effective way of repression is considered to be the 'immediate slaughter' of the offender be they feathered or otherwise. Nevertheless, this chapter argues that the notion of the silent African woman is a fallacy introduced into African culture by Eurocentric Victorian attitudes towards women, which continues to be perpetuated by some African men, and European writers and critics.<sup>2</sup>

Tamale was reminded of this myth when a female candidate's attention was drawn to the old African saying: '*Wali owulide ensera ekokolima?* "Have you ever heard a hen crow?"' by a male audience member at a campaign rally during the 1996

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<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Tamale, *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda* (Colorado, USA; Oxford, UK: Westview Press; 1999), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ama Ata Aidoo argues that Eurocentrism had a negative impact upon what can broadly be described as African culture much earlier than the era of colonialism. She states that 'as in the judgement on all matters relating to Africa since the last five hundred years when the continent came into collision with Europe, [...] her world view got almost completely submerged under that of the West'. 'Introduction' in *African Love Stories*, ed. by Ama Ata Aidoo (Banbury, Oxfordshire: Ayeibia Clarke, 2006), pp. vii – xiv) p. viii.



general elections to Uganda's national legislature.<sup>3</sup> Such a reaction is not unusual in Africa since as Austin Bukenya stresses 'silence has been one of the most powerful tools of subjugation of African women.'<sup>4</sup> Ciarunji Chesaina Swinimer emphasises Bukenya's point in her summing up of African women's social position. She states:

In traditional Africa, among many communities, especially those operating through patriarchal social systems, women occupied a very low status. Even in matriarchal communities women were not completely liberated from social discrimination. It is true they lived among their blood relatives unlike their counterparts in the patriarchal communities who lived among their in-laws, yet even here women did not enjoy much social recognition since important decisions were made on their behalf by their brothers.<sup>5</sup>

Accordingly, patriarchal values within Africa demand that women do not voice an opinion, particularly in public, since their status is constructed such that they are regarded as subordinate to men: an attitude that is upheld and reinforced by many African traditions and folklore as highlighted in previous chapters. Ciarunji Chesaina clarifies the situation:

One of the major problems facing women in post-colonial Africa in general, and Kenya in particular, is the chauvinistic traditional attitude towards women's views as unimportant and inconsequential. Indeed, in traditional and colonial Africa, women's words were regarded as mere noise. Unfortunately, the roots of tradition, including the negative aspects, go deep into the psyche of a people. Hence negative traditional attitudes towards women still thrive in contemporary African cultures. Women's views are still regarded as unimportant, as the insignificant representation of women in the parliaments of most African countries attests.<sup>6</sup>

Through the act of crowing, a hen transgresses boundaries by audibly and hence overtly, moving out of its normative silent space. The implication behind the male spectator's comment was that the political arena forms a part of the sphere of life from which the construction of African normative gender roles endeavours to exclude women. Matembe maintains that 'factors that constrain women's political participation mainly stem from traditional gender roles that separate the public and the private sphere.'<sup>7</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, colonial notions relating to the

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<sup>3</sup> Tamale, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> Austin Bukenya, 'Preface', in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region* ed. by Amandina Lihamba, Fulata L. Moyo, M.M.Mulokozi, Naomi L. Shiteni, and Saïda Yahya-Othman (New York: The Feminist Press, 2007), pp. xix-xxv (p.xx).

<sup>5</sup> Ciarunji Chesaina Swinimer, *Perspectives on Women in Africa Literature* (Nairobi: Impact Associates, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ciarunji Chesaina, 'Women's Voices and Gender Pedagogy in Post-Colonial Kenya', in *Understanding Post-Colonial Identities: Ireland, Africa and the Pacific*, ed. by Dele Layiwola (Ibadan: Oluseyi Press, 2001), pp. 196 – 212 (p. 196).

<sup>7</sup> Miria Matembe, 'Letter from Miria Matembe', *African Women Leaders Project*, <http://www.awlproject.org/voices/womens-voices/letter-from-miria-matembe/> [accessed 5 March 2009] (para. 3 of 8).



normative position occupied by European women further emphasised African women's occupation of the domestic, "private" space of home and family, and the male's association with the "public" space of business and politics. Carole Boyce Davies understands that:

The selection of males for formal education was fostered by the colonial institutions which made specific choices in educating male and female. Then too, the sex role distinctions common to many African societies supported the notion that western education was a barrier to a woman's role as a wife and mother and an impediment to her success in these traditional modes of acquiring status. With few exceptions, girls were kept away from formal and especially higher education. The colonial administrations were therefore willing accomplices because they imported a view of the world in which women were of secondary importance. Clearly then, European colonialism, as well as traditional attitudes of and to women, combined to exclude African women from the educational processes [...].<sup>8</sup>

These educational practices therefore aided the marginalization, discrimination, oppression, and silencing of African women's voices. Audrey C. Smock, while reiterating Davies's interpretation of events, makes a significant observation:

Colonial policies had a rather important influence on sex role definitions and opportunities for women. Christian missionaries and colonial administrators brought with them Victorian conceptions concerning the place of women in society. Generally they did not appreciate the significant contributions frequently made by women and their sense of independence.<sup>9</sup>

Here Smock draws attention to African women's precolonial 'sense of independence', and in so doing hints at the myth that is integral to the construction of African normative femininity.

### **Fables and Females: The Cultural Imposition of Constructed Norms**

It should be stressed that although African myths, proverbs and traditions depict the woman as silent, which by extension is an indication of patriarchy's endeavour to condition her through the cultural imposition of its constructed norms, what custom and society require of the African woman does not necessarily correspond to the way she actually behaves. Furthermore, Tamale emphasises that in precolonial Uganda, 'the intimate inner workings of the different cultures and historically distinct arrangement between the sexes allowed for women to participate

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<sup>8</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, 'Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism', in *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, ed. by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1986), pp. 1-23 (p. 2).

<sup>9</sup> Audrey C. Smock, 'Ghana: From Autonomy to Subordination', in *Women: Roles and Status in Eight Countries*, ed. by Janet Giele and Audrey C. Smock (New York; London: Wiley, 1977) p. 181.



in politics, both on a formal and an informal basis.’<sup>10</sup> She also reports that ‘in precolonial Uganda, women had never been confined to the private or domestic sphere’.<sup>11</sup> Her statements indicate that rather than having no voice at all particular systems have historically been in place to enable the African woman the relevant space in which to use her voice, thereby confusing the issue of the notion of the silent woman. Hence, when Ugandan women voiced an opinion by becoming involved in protests against colonial rule in 1953, notions relating to the silence of women were problematized. Likewise, members of the Mothers Union protested countrywide when Milton Obote deposed Edward Frederick Mutesa II, the Kabaka (king of the kingdom of Buganda) and the first president of the recently independent Uganda, in 1966. This experience is not peculiar to Uganda alone, however, as illustrated by the *Ogu Umunwanyi* (Women’s War), also known as the Aba women’s riots, in south-eastern Nigeria between 1928 and 1930, which similarly draws attention to the myth of silence and passivity incorporated into the construction of African female normative passivity. The demonstrations took place to protest against colonial administrators who ‘ignored [pre-existing] female political structures and denied Igbo women any means of representation, leave alone any decision-making or rule-instituting power.’<sup>12</sup> In 1929, senior women marched naked in an obvious flouting of the normative practice of elder women and an act of insulting defiance towards colonial officials.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it was impossible for British colonial males to envisage the level of independence that Igbo women demanded and regarded as a normative part of their identity and existence. Moreover, the revolutionary action of the Igbo women points to their refusal to be silent or silenced about their grievances even in the face of death.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Matembe offers further examples. She explains:

In Rwanda, women played a leading role in the reconciliation process. In Burundi, women were at the forefront in negotiating peace and reconciliation. In Uganda, apart from participating in the peace and conflict resolution process in

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<sup>10</sup> Tamale, p.3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Hazel V. Carby, ‘White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood’, in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, ed. by H. Baker, M. Diawara & R. Lindeborg (Chicago, Ill; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Misty L. Bastian, ‘The Naked and the Nude: Historically Multiple Meaning of *Oto* (Undress) in Southeastern Nigeria’, in *Dirt, Undress, and Difference: Critical Perspectives on the Body’s Surface* ed. by Adeline Masquelier (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 34 – 60 (p.45).

<sup>14</sup> Between December 1929 and January 1930, 25,000 Igbo women faced colonial oppression and at least fifty were killed – see ‘Wars of the World “The Women’s War in Nigeria 1929-1930”’ <http://www.onwar.com/aced/data/whiskey/womens1929.htm> [accessed 10 June 2009]



the areas of insurgency in the country, women have played a big role in the counselling and rehabilitation of the victims of war.<sup>15</sup>

In keeping with the construct of normative feminine behaviour, nevertheless, there seems to be a tendency for dominant patriarchal discourse to marginalize and silence women's histories, or her-stories of African women rebelling against colonialists and their associated land seizures throughout Africa. However, it seems that even when her-stories are not marginalized, as in the case of the Aba women's riots or Women's War, the act of senior women undressing and baring their bodies in an independent gesture of insubordination and rebelliousness is silenced in many accounts of the women's protest. Significantly, while the dominant discourse suppresses accounts of women's strength of character and heroism, in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region* it is highlighted that:

the oral traditions, the myths, and legends told by women themselves often place women where they belong: at the center of the historical and legendary origins of their civilisations, and at the heart of their peoples' struggles.<sup>16</sup>

This indicates that African women resist silencing and that they are aware of their historical achievements and their own abilities and capabilities. Hence, Kimenye is 'baffled' by the suggestion of a silent and passive female African presence, and is adamant when saying 'No, I never saw anything.'<sup>17</sup> Rather, she reinforces the notion of the misconceptions surrounding the African woman, stating, 'they always give the idea that African women are sort of a silent presence - producing the food and staying in the background' but by way of contrast to this stereotype she also confirms 'I've never met a downtrodden one yet'.<sup>18</sup> However, Europeans are generally unaware that the construct of normative femininity that is created and promoted by patriarchal structures within some societies in Africa seems largely to be founded upon fallacy. Consequently, tales of these women ultimately deny and give lie to the notion of the silent passive black woman.<sup>19</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie states:

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<sup>15</sup> Matembe, 'Letter from Miria Matembe', para. 4 of 8.

<sup>16</sup> Amandina Lihamba, Fulata L. Moyo, M.M.Mulokozi, Naomi L. Shiteni, and Saïda Yahya-Othman, 'Introduction', *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2007), pp. 1-67 (p.1).

<sup>17</sup> Unpublished Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye, 6 July 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> African women resistance fighters include: Nehanda in Zimbabwe, Mekatilili wa Menza and Siotume in Kenya, Muhumusa of the Nyabingi cult in Rwanda and Uganda, and Mkomanire of Tanzania – see *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region* ed. by Amandina Lihamba, Fulata L. Moyo, M.M.Mulokozi, Naomi L. Shiteni, and Saïda Yahya-Othman (New York: The Feminist Press, 2007), p.1.



It needs to be stressed that there were indigenous “feminisms” prior to our contact with Europe [...]. Therefore “feminism” or the fight for women’s rights and women’s interests is not the result of “contamination” by the West or, a simple imitation, as divisive opponents like to charge. [...] The truth is that there have always been, in every culture, indigenous forms of feminism which may take various forms [...].<sup>20</sup>

It is undeniable that the subject of African feminisms is a contentious one, but it is nevertheless generally considered a contemporary development borne out of Africa’s associations with Europe. However, in presenting the facts, Ogundipe-Leslie illustrates that historically African women have not required European intervention or encouragement to transgress normative feminine behavioural boundaries constructed by patriarchal ideologies within some societies in Africa. This viewpoint corresponds with that of Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, who stresses that, ‘women have never been silent in communities when situations got out of hand. If this is feminism, then perhaps Nigerian women have always been feminists.’<sup>21</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall underscores what Tamale, Ogundipe-Leslie and Ogunyemi say when she argues, ‘feminism does not belong to Euro-American women’,<sup>22</sup> and that, ‘black women are not appropriating an alien discourse, and that the contours of Western feminism have to be revisioned, reimagined when one takes into consideration the feminist theorizing of women in the African Diaspora.’<sup>23</sup> The case promoted by these women is that feminism in Africa has always existed, albeit not necessarily under the umbrella of that specific terminology and not in the same format as European feminism. According to Ogunyemi:

Male critics castigate women for fighting against the mentality of total subordination and commitment to patriarchy, the stronghold that supposedly will get us out of our mess. They consider it self-defeating, anti-African, and feminist to criticize the society openly [...]. Feminism therefore continues to be offensive, though some respectable writers are daring to flirt with the ideology by Africanizing it.<sup>24</sup>

Womanism is a popular (theoretical) African feminist approach conceived by Alice Walker to explain and relate to the experiences and viewpoint of African-American

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<sup>20</sup> Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1994), p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, *Africa Wo/man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 116.

<sup>22</sup> Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ‘Speaking for Ourselves: Feminisms in the African Diaspora’, in *Decolonizing the Academy: African Diaspora Studies*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies et.al. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), pp. 27-42 (p. 28).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>24</sup> Ogunyemi, p. 116.



women. Ogunidipe-Leslie states that Womanism is less offensive to African men because it positions women back in a non-threatening and non-radical position.<sup>25</sup> Womanism is concerned to challenge all forms of oppression that obstruct black women's liberation, and therefore examines African women's position with a feminist consciousness in order to release African women from patriarchal, racial and class oppression, but it also incorporates and maintains traditional African family values. In theory, the effect of this approach is that the level of transgression committed by women who adopt this method of attaining emancipation is not so overt in comparison with the actions of the radical African feminists such as Tamale and Matembe. For example, Tamale admits of Matembe that her bearing and manner do not conform to normative African femininity because she is 'forceful and aggressive.'<sup>26</sup> Matembe does not blend silently into the background exuding deference to the African male, and neither can she be envisioned getting down on her knees to demonstrate respect to the male in the traditional Ugandan manner. Rather, her preferred stance is to sit with her legs crossed from ankle to knee, which Tamale defines as 'a posture traditionally associated with masculinity and power.'<sup>27</sup> Matembe is blatant and deliberate in her feminist approach to improving the well-being of African women. However, many African women find that there are difficulties associated with adopting such an extreme and direct approach to female emancipation. One problem is that some African men are dismissive and unreceptive because the challenge female behaviour of this type offers them, and the status quo as they know it is huge since such conduct is so fundamentally unlike the traditional way of doing things. This is highlighted by the actions of prominent Kenyan feminist and Nobel Peace Prize Winner 2004, Wangari Maathai's husband, who divorced her because she failed to conform to African normative femininity.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, women's groups have even condemned her for her failure to submit to men, as well as for transgressing African traditions;<sup>29</sup> this indicates the second difficulty. When a prominent activist faces public condemnation by other women, it follows that the

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<sup>25</sup> Molaria Ogunidipe-Leslie, 'Black...Issues in Culture, Narrative and Representation', Unpublished Lecture at the University of Derby, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Tamale, p.43.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>28</sup> Jeanne Daigle states, 'Wangari's husband left her and her three children. He was given a divorce on the grounds that Wangari was "too educated, too strong, too successful, too stubborn, and too hard to control"' in 'Wangari Maathai – Tree Woman of Kenya', *African Culture Site* <http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art16968.asp> [accessed 11 March 09] (para. 2 of 6)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., para. 2 of 6.



uneasiness 'ordinary' African women find embracing and assuming radical African feminist behaviours stems from the negative repercussions in all areas of their day-to-day lives that would be prompted by such actions. For instance, Isaac Ssetuba shows that in Ganda proverbs, the woman who refuses to be silent and submissive before her husband amounts to an 'abominable' woman, for example, '*Kaggwe ensonyi; ng'omukazi ayomba ne bba* (As abominable as a woman who engages her husband in a quarrel).'<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, there is the additional knowledge that the avoidance of disgrace is a means of retaining one's husband: "*Siiwemuke*" *y'afa n'omwami* ("I fear dishonour", keeps husband for good).'<sup>31</sup> Hence, not only would the 'ordinary' radical African feminist encounter resistance and reprisal from the males around her, she would almost certainly be kept at a distance, if not shunned entirely by her fellow women fearful of the consequences of their association with such an obvious transgressor of boundaries.

A much less challenging form of African female activism, referred to earlier, in Chapter 3, has been termed nego-feminism by Obioma Nnaemeka. She states:

I call *nego-feminism* – the brand of feminism that I see unfolding in Africa. But what is *nego-feminism*? First, *nego-feminism* is the feminism of negotiation; second, *nego-feminism* stands for "no-ego" feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of "give and take/exchange" and "cope with successfully/go around." African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise.<sup>32</sup>

Nnaemeka has found that in practice, women throughout Africa are more comfortable with a less revolutionary approach to female activism. This more subtle approach to fighting for women's rights relies upon their ability to give the illusion of conforming to African normative femininity but in reality co-operating and bargaining with men to achieve their own agenda. This give and take approach to achieving a greater level of equality, and to defeating the marginalization and discrimination of women, is much less threatening than other forms of African feminism. In seemingly occupying her traditionally submissive space, the African woman not only appears to suppress her own sense of self, but also strokes the ego of the patriarchal chauvinistic African

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<sup>30</sup> Isaac Ssetuba, 'The Hold of Patriarchy: An Appraisal of the Ganda Proverb in the Light of Modern Gender Relations', unpublished paper for the Cairo Gender Symposium, CODESRIA/ARC Cairo 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> April 2002, 1 – 7 (p. 2).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Obioma Nnaemeka, 'Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way', in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 29:2 (2004), 357 – 385 (pp. 377 - 378).



male. What becomes apparent then is that when African feminism is perceived as being informed largely by European feminist ideals, behaviours and mannerisms, it is regarded negatively and therefore as an extremist position. This is possibly because the inherent disadvantage of the term 'feminism' is connected to the advent of colonialism, which increased Africans' awareness and exposure to dominant Western ideologies. Consequently, the negativity directed towards Eurocentrism has become attached to African feminisms. Thus Chesaina states:

Feminism is perhaps the ideology that has generated the most heated debates in post-colonial Kenya and post-colonial Africa in general. Although the essence of feminism really addresses itself to the creation of equal opportunities for women, the ideology has been viewed with suspicion and as though it is potentially dangerous to healthy relations between men and women in the African context.<sup>33</sup>

If it is not made clear that systematic and institutionalized oppression of women is the target of feminist action and reaction, as opposed to simply attacking the African male, healthy male/female relations will deteriorate. A specific reason for African men's wariness and continued rejection of the female liberation struggle is its association with property ownership laws that are regarded by many women as reinforcing the vulnerability of the African woman through the legalised discrimination of her.<sup>34</sup> Anne Marie Goetz and Shireen Hassim explain:

In most societies, gender equality concerns are counter-cultural: they challenge the interests of individual men, and of groups constituted on the basis of patriarchal privilege. For instance, clan- or tribe-based power structures do not welcome the disruption to traditional property ownership patterns which women's claims to land rights represent. The demands of feminists can provoke social conflict [...].<sup>35</sup>

Women in many African countries have property of their own because their fathers have transferred it to them. However, an area of dispute arises because, unlike the practice observed in many European countries, upon the death of a woman's husband his property does not automatically pass to his wife but can be claimed by his parents or brothers, thereby causing potential financial hardship for the widow. When prominent women like Matembe and Tamale become involved in such inflammatory issues, no wonder then that their overt and unashamed feminist proclamations are viewed as a challenge to existing socio-political conditions throughout Africa.

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<sup>33</sup> Chesaina, 'Women's Voices and Gender Pedagogy in Post-Colonial Kenya', p. 210.

<sup>34</sup> Miria Matembe, *Gender, Politics and Constitution Making in Uganda* (Kampala: Fountain, 2002), p. 213.

<sup>35</sup> Anne Marie Goetz and Shireen Hassim, 'Introduction: Women in Power in Uganda and South Africa', in *No Shortcuts to Power: African Women in Politics and Policy Making* ed. by Anne Marie Goetz and Shireen Hassim (London; New York: Zed Books, 2003), pp. 1 – 28) p. 6.



Nevertheless, Tamale insists that 'women are increasingly negating the metaphor of the crowing hen. They are defying custom, culture, discrimination, and marginalization to join formal politics in Uganda.'<sup>36</sup> One such African woman who has done this is Miria Matembe. A renowned Ugandan feminist and former political minister, she is thus defined by Tamale as 'exemplif[ying] the hen that has begun to crow.'<sup>37</sup> Deliberate and overt in her beliefs and opinions, Matembe explains:

My title became the "Controversial and uncompromising Matembe." Why? Because I said things that women were not supposed to say. I challenged the unchallengeable.'<sup>38</sup>

It begins to become evident that the likes of Matembe are not necessarily saying anything new, however. According to Ogundipe-Leslie, Ogunyemi and Guy-Sheftall, for many years African women have been saying the same things that prominent African feminists are currently saying - a notion that is also supported by Kimenye. She argues that in her experience African women are extremely strong characters. Speaking specifically of her mother-in-law Kimenye states:

She was so typical of her generation. They didn't know the word 'no'. And my father-in-law was very strict in lots of ways, but my God, she used to twist him round her finger - she was great. And I found this wherever I went. I don't know - I've never had to stop and think about this.<sup>39</sup>

In a single statement, Kimenye brings together the opinion that the silent African woman is a misconception and the notion that the feminism referred to by Nnaemeka as nego-feminism is far from a contemporary development that has occurred as a reaction to European intervention and contamination of traditional ways. The element that is new, nevertheless, is that of the media. Whereas the more overtly vocal and hence openly transgressive African females were previously either just not heard or were silenced, the media gives women such as Matembe, Tamale and Maathai a voice. With the advent and spread of print, visual and audio media, the voices of women like Matembe who are engaged in 'challenging systems and structures that oppress women' are now heard, whereas previously their audience would have been limited.<sup>40</sup> However, Idi Amin's war in Uganda, and the fight for independence or *uhuru*, and the associated Mau Mau activities in Kenya changed things: many women became widows as well as soldiers. This situation lasted even longer in Uganda as

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<sup>36</sup> Tamale, p.1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>38</sup> Matembe, 'Letter from Miria Matembe', para. 7 of 8.

<sup>39</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye, 6 July 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Matembe, *Gender, Politics and Constitution Making in Uganda*, p. 210.



during Obote's second term of office even more women were widowed. The result was that in Uganda in particular, women had to become the head of the household and take on more responsibilities. Nevertheless, it was a fundamental change to the traditional organisation of the family unit that was supported by the Ugandan government. In February 1974, in an address during a cabinet meeting, Amin told his ministers, 'you must not make the womens [sic] of Uganda very weak.'<sup>41</sup> He went on to say 'appoint women to be the managers of hotel, [...] I want to see a woman – International Hotel, very big one must be woman Ugandans and I know they can do it [sic].'<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Amin cautioned his cabinet:

And you as minister you must back them completely.  
If you find any man trying to not to obey the order and everything, you can punish that person, you can remover that person, you can put loyal people to her to see that we keep up standard [sic].<sup>43</sup>

Placing women in positions of authority, giving them power over men, and publicly emphasising his support of such was Amin's acknowledgement of not only women's ability to manage situations, but also of their voice and their capacity to use it. By extension, however, Amin's act recognised and drew attention to the patriarchal construct of Ugandan women's normative silent space. Matembe maintains that African women are now at a point when they can be openly feminist. In her writing she does state, nevertheless, that there was a period when 'the word feminist did not augur well in Uganda'<sup>44</sup> and that general opinion was that "a feminist" was a dangerous, a terrible woman. If you mentioned that word, people would distance themselves from you.'<sup>45</sup> She states:

These days women in Uganda have reached a certain stage in public life so that we are able to say that we are feminists, and it doesn't get us into trouble as it did a decade ago.<sup>46</sup>

However, the phrase 'public life' is of particular significance in this statement, especially as Matembe is noticeably far less active in her fight for women's rights now that she is no longer a government minister. Prominent African women in the public spotlight, like Matembe and Tamale, who occupy a certain privileged middle to

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<sup>41</sup> Anne Abaho, 'Amin Talked Down his Ministers like Pupils', transcript of unedited version of Idi Amin's address during a cabinet meeting in February 1974, in *The New Vision*, 30 January 2009 <http://www.newvision.co.ug/PA/9/183/669810> [accessed 6 March 2009] (para. 8 of 15)

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., para. 8 of 15.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., para. 9 of 15.

<sup>44</sup> Matembe, *Gender, Politics and Constitution Making in Uganda*, p. 209.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 210.

upper class socio-political position with money and power to their name, evidently acquire the courage and associated freedom to be open about defining their struggle for women's rights honestly as feminists. Nevertheless, this does not hold true for what might be termed 'ordinary' women out of the public eye, or even necessarily for less revolutionary African female politicians. Overtly vociferous African women are still perceived in terms of 'an omen of bad tidings that must be expiated through the immediate slaughter of the offending bird.'<sup>47</sup> It is apparent that 'ordinary' women cannot yet be comfortable with openly admitting to being feminists when even women's groups condemn prominent women like Maathai for transgressing traditional boundaries of African normative femininity. The media gives Kimenye and Macgoye a voice in terms of their fiction, while Ogot's voice is heard both in the political and fictional arena. All three writers are prominent figures in what Matembe terms 'public life' and yet they do not openly declare any feminist inclinations. Rather, in her role of female politician, for example, Ogot is reluctant to be perceived in terms of the African feminist. Likewise, prominent writers, Kimenye and Macgoye, are adamant about their rejection of African feminisms. To some African contemporary female writers, including Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot, the myth of the downtrodden and oppressed African woman is a creation of European writers/critics and African men. What is paradoxical, nevertheless, is that their words and actions are not consistent with the apolitical position they project when asked about their feminisms. This prompts an investigation into their perceived alterity in the light of their stated lack of identification with African feminism.

### Alterity

Nalova Lyonga states 'there exist two ends of the scale of African women's existence: their domination, which is the clearer but weaker perspective; and their dynamism, the stronger but elusive point.'<sup>48</sup> This impression would seem to support Kimenye's argument regarding the resourcefulness and strength of character she has always observed as a characteristic of African women.<sup>49</sup> Yet Lyonga's statement

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<sup>47</sup> Tamale, p.1.

<sup>48</sup> Nalova Lyonga, 'African Women and Feminist Theory', in *Defining New Idioms and Alternative Forms of Expression* ed. by Eckhard Breiting (Amsterdam; Atlanta: ANSEL, 1996), pp. 153 – 165 (p.165).

<sup>49</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye. See also Chapter 3.



raises the question of whether Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot, who are all clearly dynamic in every sense of the word, are also dominated by the patriarchal society within which they live to the extent that they feel obliged to deny their feminist beliefs. Alternatively, can we regard their rejection of African feminism as a marker of their dynamism in that their preferred method of effecting change is to work with male hegemony and leadership to maintain the status quo whilst addressing feminist issues in a covert and non-threatening manner? My attempt to answer these questions is made by firstly considering Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot's response to questions during interviews and/or letters; and secondly, the representation and voicing of feminist issues in their texts, which is the concern of the second half of this chapter.

The condition of alterity is described by Emmanuel Levinas as an Otherness 'defined by its absolute right to exist' because the self is unable to negate the Otherness by taming or suppressing it.<sup>50</sup> Central to postmodern debates relating to identity, this condition is not only defined as a lack of identification with a part of one's community, but can also be understood in terms of the dissociation with some aspect of one's character. Discussing the condition of alterity and elucidating further, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states, '(S)he is more at home in producing and simulating the effect of an older world constituted by the legitimising narratives of cultural and ethnic specificity and continuity'.<sup>51</sup> Drawing on these definitions as a framework for my ensuing discussion, my aim is to question whether, in denying a part of their character that manifests itself in their failure to identify with other prominent African politicians, intellectuals, and writers like Tamale, Matembe and Maathai, who openly proclaim their feminist inclinations, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot can be perceived as being defined by Spivak's explanation of alterity. Ogundipe-Leslie affirms that 'many of the African female writers like to declare that they are not feminists, as if it were a crime to be feminist.'<sup>52</sup> Clearly, it is necessary to examine the position the writers of this study choose to adopt. Yet also to enquire whether their dismissal of feminism and feminists emerges because of the negativity surrounding popular stereotypes of both European bra-burning, man-hating feminists,

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<sup>50</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (London: Athlone, 1999) in Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890 – 1920: Resistance in Interaction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 176 – 177.

<sup>51</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Who Claims Alterity', in *Remaking History* ed. by Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989), pp. 269 – 292 (p. 275).

<sup>52</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves*, p. 64.



as drawn attention to by Simidele Dosekun,<sup>53</sup> and the type of radical African feminists already discussed, or merely a desire to be perceived as conforming to African normative femininity.

Kimenye refutes any suggestion that she is either an intellectual or that she may exhibit feminist concerns. Nevertheless, she transgresses boundaries in relation to the construction of African normative femininity due to her penchant for depicting strong female characters with autonomy and a sense of self, and through her associated reluctance to portray stereotypical images of female oppression, passivity and silence in her fiction. Yet when confronted with the idea that she transgresses boundaries in this way she states, 'I just think African women are very, very strong characters generally.'<sup>54</sup> She continues, 'I don't know – I've never had to stop and think about this, but when I do, I just don't know what you mean.'<sup>55</sup> Her confusion stems not only from living amongst, and associating with, African women of various cultures, but from the knowledge that she herself has autonomy and a voice that is heard. Due to her, that voice continues to be heard throughout Africa and worldwide. However, from the outset of her writing career, her voice was a respected component of a predominantly male coterie. Recalling these years she states:

I used to work from 7 until 9 in the evening. Then James Ngũgĩ used to amble down – he was writing his first book at Makerere – and I remember I was hard at it on *Kalasanda*, and he ambled down and we were talking, and I said, 'oh I could do with a beer, couldn't you?' and he said, 'yes'. And we went up to the Toplife, was it? (Laughs) And they had a bar in the cellar. And we went down and we found Okot and somebody else from Makerere, and we sat there 'til three o'clock in the morning drinking beer – we didn't get drunk, we were drinking beer and talking [...] we would sit there and we would discuss what we were writing, or something we'd read by somebody else. It was the same when they had the [1962] writers' conference at Makerere. That was great because *everybody* was there.<sup>56</sup>

Kimenye was one of the very few African women who were writing at this time and as a result, her history undercuts and problematizes the normative silent space attributed to women in many African cultures. Yet in doing so, it indicates that the condition of alterity can be applied to her on two separate levels: she dismisses her delineation of strong female characters as being associated with a feminist consciousness, hence is unable to identify with the part of her community comprised of African feminists. In addition, because her voice is heard in the worldwide (male

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<sup>53</sup> Simidele Dosekun, 'Defending Feminism in Africa', in *Postamble* 3:1 (2007) 41 – 47 (p. 43).

<sup>54</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



and female) community she is different to the body of African women who appear to occupy woman's normative silent space.

By contrast, Ogot thinks of herself as a 'rebel.'<sup>57</sup> She was first nominated and served as a member of Kenya's parliament in 1983.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, Mike Kuria notes that a particular concern of hers is 'the marginalisation of women in the public domain contrary to provisions for their involvement within the traditional structures of Luo society.'<sup>59</sup> In traditional Luo culture, when a woman is past the age of child bearing, she acquires a power previously denied her in her younger years. Macgoye explains that after the menopause women are 'allowed to express an opinion, perhaps formally in the council, more often by advising her menfolk, who highly esteem her stored wisdom.'<sup>60</sup> In this manner, traditional society constructs a normative space for the Luo woman to progressively enter into and so voice an opinion without fear of transgressing the boundaries of normative femininity. Traditionally, age and wisdom therefore effectively enable Luo women to become like men in that they have a voice, and voice respected opinions. Ogot's concern, however, is that continuously women's traditional 'public' space is being sidelined. The obvious effect of Luo women's marginalization in this manner is that it reinforces the misconception of the silent woman, but also transmits the message that even in the normative space where traditionally women had a voice their contribution is insignificant. Taking account, therefore, of Ogot's own understanding of herself as a 'rebel',<sup>61</sup> and her fight against the marginalization of women in the public sphere, the natural conclusion to reach is that she is concerned to challenge the oppression of women in African society. As such, this would situate her in the category of 'feminist' because she 'is a person who is struggling to uplift women [...].'<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, when questioned by Kuria about her feminist approach, Ogot's answers seem paradoxical:

KURIA: Now being a leading figure as far as women's issues are concerned in Kenya...

OGOT: I am what?

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<sup>57</sup> Grace Ogot in *Talking Gender: Conversations with Kenyan Women Writers* ed. by Mike Kuria (Nairobi, Kenya: PJ Kenya, 2003), p.79.

<sup>58</sup> Mike Kuria, *Talking Gender: Conversations with Kenyan Women Writers* (Nairobi, Kenya: PJ Kenya, 2003), p.71.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>60</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye to Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 20 May 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Ogot in *Talking Gender*, p.79.

<sup>62</sup> Matembe, *Gender, Politics and Constitution Making in Uganda*, p. 210.

KURIA: I mean you are one of the leading women in terms of championing for women's rights...

OGOT: Actually well-being.<sup>63</sup>

Ogot's reply indicates her reticence and possible fear at being perceived as feminist 'Other' – which is how African society perceives overtly feminist women, as discussed at length earlier. Yet it also echoes Matembe's feelings during the period she refused the feminist label. Her constant defence was, 'Me, I'm not a feminist. I'm a self-styled advocate for women's rights.'<sup>64</sup> Matembe reasons that during her younger years she did not have a full understanding of what a feminist fights for and that in the early 1990s people would dissociate themselves from you because feminists were thought to be 'dangerous' and 'terrible' women.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Ogundipe-Leslie maintains that women are fearful of the notion of African feminism, and suggests that the reason is that many African women are unaware of the history of feminism and do not fully realise their own oppression.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, she proposes that women who live in volatile socio-political environments are concerned about the potential danger associated with aligning themselves with a position that is widely regarded as radical, particularly in a continent where imprisonment occurs for many and varied minor matters.<sup>67</sup> Although the possibility exists that Ogot, like Matembe in her earlier years, is naïve in her understanding of the history of feminism, this cannot be said of Macgoye, whose letters comment on the failing of white Western universalist feminisms, as highlighted in Chapter 1. Macgoye states:

It appears to me that feminism is a forty-year aberration, hopefully near its end – as distinct from universal concerns for equal pay, equal opportunity, safety regulations in the workplace and respect for colleagues – which has called on women to devalue their traditional roles and responsibilities in deference to the greater mobility of men.<sup>68</sup>

It seems that for Macgoye, feminism is a transgression that undermines normative femininity and the woman's associated position in the domestic sphere. Yet, despite her constant and fierce denials of her own feminist persuasions, those who know her well confirm that she exhibits 'all the hallmarks of feminist orientation, feminist awareness.'<sup>69</sup> This notion is further reinforced by her role of member of the board of

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<sup>63</sup> Mike Kuria and Grace Ogot in *Talking Gender*, p.88

<sup>64</sup> Matembe, *Gender, Politics and Constitution Making in Uganda*, p. 210.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>66</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, 'Black...Issues in Culture, Narrative and Representation'.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Unpublished letter from Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye to Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 1 August 2006.

<sup>69</sup> Unpublished interview between Austin Bukenya and Elizabeth F. Oldfield, 25 March 2008.



advisors to *The Women Writing Africa Project*, and that of associate editor and contributor for *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, since what is claimed to unite the authors and texts in this particular series is their 'feminist consciousness.'<sup>70</sup>

However, Bukenya advises that:

Many of the authors herein may not be self-proclaimed feminists. But their objective experiences as women battling with the realities of existence in prescribed and "proscribed" or prohibitive communities often engender their desire and determination to transform their lives and those of other women and ultimately of all humanity. The creation of the expressive texts [...] is itself part of that empowering action.<sup>71</sup>

What is clear is that regardless of Macgoye's continued refusal to be verbally aligned with feminism, her publications give her a voice and so highlight her struggle against female oppression and her associated commitment to female emancipation, thereby removing her from the constructed normative position of silent passive woman. However, in addition to the feminist denials of Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot, Ogundipe-Leslie states that 'these denials come from unlikely writers such as Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, even Mariama Bâ. I would put this down to the successful intimidation of African women by men over issues of women's liberations and feminism.'<sup>72</sup> Her suggestion is that the determination of writers not to recognise and align themselves with African feminist concerns emanates from women's fear of placing themselves in a position that has been radicalised by African men wishing to intimidate women regarding their own liberation. In *Women Writing Africa*, it is recognised that in recent years, gender has become central to the socio-political discourse and activism of African women, and the text therefore raises the question, 'What kind of feminism?'<sup>73</sup> For Kimenye, it appears that she genuinely believes in the innate strength of African women, and as such regards them as empowered, or if not empowered, blessed with the attributes to become so when they choose. Yet with regard to Macgoye and Ogot, they do seem 'more at home in producing and simulating the effect of an older world constituted by the legitimising narratives of cultural and ethnic specificity and continuity'.<sup>74</sup> This suggests that, for them, their continued rebuttal of allegations relating to their feminist orientations is a way of

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<sup>70</sup> Amandina Lihamba, Fulata L. Moyo, M.M.Mulokozi, Naomi L. Shiteni, and Saïda Yahya-Othman, 'Introduction', *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2007), pp. 1-67 (p.2).

<sup>71</sup> Austin Bukenya, 'Preface', in *Women Writing Africa: The Eastern Region*, pp. xix-xxv (p.xx).

<sup>72</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves*, p. 64.

<sup>73</sup> Lihamba and others, p. 54.

<sup>74</sup> Spivak, p. 275.

appearing to comply with patriarchy, and as such is to be regarded as a strategic act through which they may attain female power. This forms close links with what Nnaemeka has previously defined as nego-feminism. Nevertheless, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot are 'Other'. They are 'Other' to the 'ordinary' African women who covertly resort to methods of co-operation in the manner of nego-feminism, because their conversation displays a feminist awareness at odds with their denials. They are also 'Other' to the more radical African feminists, not only because of their continued denials, but because initially they seem to fit the construct of normative femininity by taking on the traditional female role of the orator or storyteller. It is to this role, their commitment as writers,<sup>75</sup> and the extent to which they exhibit feminist concerns in their text that my attention turns next.

## Part Two

### Transgressing Boundaries: Self-Affirmation and Recovery of Self

Taking account of the discussion so far, it follows that the problem for women throughout Africa is that their views are generally perceived to be 'unimportant and inconsequential'<sup>76</sup> since as Chesaina highlights, 'in traditional and colonial Africa, women's words were regarded as mere noise.'<sup>77</sup> It comes as no surprise then that Abasi Kiyimba reports that for a variety of reasons, including social and cultural ones, the act of writing in Uganda has 'mainly been dominated by men.'<sup>78</sup> This is not unique to Uganda, however, and consequently, although women are traditionally associated with the African oral tradition and the distribution of knowledge to younger generations through stories, myths and legends, by writing and publishing narratives, African females are crossing over into what has generally been regarded as a male landscape. However, the point in question is whether or not, in their role of female storytellers, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot comply with patriarchal constructs of normative femininity. As indicated, the female storyteller is a role that is traditionally associated with normative femininity. However, in reality do these women perform a strategic act that paradoxically facilitates the covert attainment of

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<sup>75</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves*, p. 57.

<sup>76</sup> Chesaina, p. 196.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>78</sup> Abasi Kiyimba, 'Male Identity and Female Space in the Fiction of Uganda Women Writers', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9:3 (May 2008), 193-222 (p. 194).



female power through the voicing of feminist concerns and issues in their creative writing? This section focuses on characters that manifest behaviours that deviate from the traditionally ascribed behaviour of normative femininity, thereby attributing the condition of alterity to them. Employing select texts as case studies, and drawing on Davies's concept of normative femininity, Boehmer's notion of the textual and temporal/territorial transgressive methods of writing, and Ogundipe-Leslie's appeal for the destruction of stereotypes of African women,<sup>79</sup> I offer an in-depth analysis into the transgression of boundaries and the subsequent creation of African women's identities through the representation of fictional African female characters.

### **An African Female Perspective**

Concentration upon the critiquing of African women's fictional writing is limited in comparison to the attention lavished upon the work of male authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Okot p'Bitek and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for example. But the writing of Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot differs fundamentally in that these authors bring sharply into focus the female perspective because their writing is a vehicle for the representation of what Jean F. O'Barr refers to as 'women's attitudes and behaviour towards contemporary gender role questions.'<sup>80</sup> Hence, their expression of African women's values and ambitions can not only be viewed as 'a creative expression of [African] culture' but as something far more dynamic in that their writing is a challenging and thought provoking protest against the continued subjugation of women.<sup>81</sup>

Traditionally accepted constructions and perceptions of African women have resulted in the perpetuation of the stereotyping of women in African literature. For example, Ogundipe-Leslie demonstrates that in addition to the sweet mother figure (often conflated with the Mother Africa figure, as detailed in Chapter 1) there exist a variety of other images including the fervent and sensual lover, the "sophisticated" city girl', and the naïve and unchanging rural woman.<sup>82</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie argues that

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<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>80</sup> Jean F. O'Barr, 'Feminist Issues in the Fiction of Kenya's Women Writers', in *Women in African Literature Today* ed. by Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer & Marjorie Jones (Oxford: James Currey, 1987; repr. 2002), pp. 55 – 70 (p. 57).

<sup>81</sup> Swinimer, 'Introduction'.

<sup>82</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves*, p. 58.

all of these stereotypes are 'unreal being[s]', hence her call to African women writers for their eradication.

In *The Graduate* (1980) Ogot draws attention to the role women played during the Kenya Emergency, challenges popular stereotypes of African women and attempts to shatter the 'myth of a woman's place being in the kitchen.'<sup>83</sup> Of women's involvement in Kenya's fight for independence, the third person narrator states:

She [the Hon. Mrs. Juanina Karungaru] vividly remembered the role women in Kenya played to help those trapped by the Emergency. Country wide Women's Wing of the National Allied Trade Unions, constantly and ceaselessly, supplied food and ammunition that were then secretly passed on to the freedom fighters. [...] selected women for the job, strapped the guns tightly on their bodies along their bellies; then put their simple clothes on top of the weapons, and held the babies tightly on – their busts [sic].<sup>84</sup>

The extract indicates how Ogot moves away from female stereotypes to demonstrate that women had a role to play in the fight for the nation's freedom. However, it was a role that centres on behaviours that comply with normative femininity. Supplying food and ammunition to the freedom fighters, the women used motherhood as a cover for their activities. Thus, through the apparently innocuous and normative act of breastfeeding their babies, Ogot draws on herstories of Kenyan women subverting normative feminine behaviour for the cause of a nation's independence. Yet, it is women such as these who occupy a new Third Space<sup>85</sup> that feeds the desire for female representation in the first parliament of a newly independent Kenya. Hence, possibly more revolutionary than female involvement in freedom fighting is Ogot's representation of the Hon. Mrs. Juanina Karungaru. The narrator states:

The President appointed the Hon. Juanina Karungaru M.P., Member for Nairobi East, to the post of Minister for Public Affairs. To the women of Kenya and to the men who supported the cause of the women, the President had demonstrated his political maturity to the whole world, by rewarding ability and hard work, regardless of sex.<sup>86</sup>

In a society where 'they look down upon girls', the role Juanina has to play as a female minister is significant.<sup>87</sup> Her female perspective is that it will enable her to champion women's well being in the form of bringing to the fore and crowing about the difficulties women face in their daily lives. Speaking to her daughter, Nyokabi, Juanina tells her that the group, 'The Union of Kenya Women':

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<sup>83</sup> Grace Ogot, *The Graduate* (Nairobi: Uzima, 1980), p. 8.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>86</sup> Ogot, *The Graduate*, p.13.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.6.



[...] want me to help the women get very many things for their children: like good nursery schools, health clinics, and little shops where they can market farm produce, and handicraft. They also want the...government to take clean water to the villages, to relieve the women from the back breaking job.<sup>88</sup>

Additionally, Juanina believes that her position will allow her to promote the message that 'little girls are just as clever, and important as boys. That no one should discriminate against girls', thereby promoting equality between the sexes.<sup>89</sup> In a very patriarchal society, where women are traditionally constructed as 'Other', Juanina's intentions are transgressive and radical, but her public space enables her to articulate for those women who cannot speak out because of their socio-economic status. Similarly, Ogot's insertion of female conversations between Juanina and Nyokabi illustrates Ogot's disregard of the cultural authority attached to masculinist African literature and her associated boundary crossing, as discussed in Chapter 1. The textual interruption between mother and daughter illustrates the female perspective and the strong desire of women to attain autonomy. However, Ogot also demonstrates that the crossing of boundaries of normative femininity that Juanina's ministerial position involves impacts upon her husband, Ileri, whose normative masculinity is subverted:

To an African man, who for a long time saw himself as the head of the family, being forced by a situation to follow in the footsteps of his wife, was indeed an awkward situation.<sup>90</sup>

Juanina's occupation of this new Third Space has the effect of undermining Ileri's masculinity, which results in him becoming more like a woman as he transgresses normative boundaries of masculine behaviour. Ogot illustrates this as Ileri 'helped with the serving' at his wife's ministerial meetings.<sup>91</sup> However, Juanina seems aware that in order for her to be able to continue to grow without being defeated by patriarchy, she will have to employ sophisticated and subtle forms of negotiation in order to still fulfil her traditional role of wife and mother and avoid the continued emasculation of her husband. Thus, there are occasions when she has to appear to conform to African normative femininity. When she visits New York on a recruitment tour to persuade Kenyans studying in America to return home, the students 'saw in this great lady of Africa, an ideal sister, an elder sister, who in the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.9.

African context could deputise for a mother'.<sup>92</sup> Although it can be argued that the representation of Juanina conforms to the stereotyping of African women, in this instance, the perception of her as a Mother Africa figure works in her favour and can be regarded as a covert way of achieving power. Similarly, when Juanina meets the students she 'made no secret of her feelings, as her lips quivered with emotion, and her eyes brimmed with tears'.<sup>93</sup> In this instance, such a feminine display of feelings and female qualities in a public space that would generally be perceived as a weakness has the effect of turning the situation to her advantage. But she should not be regarded as weak. Rather, Ogot represents a rounded character that is in touch with her emotions yet also one that 'is woman of her own mind, and writes her own speeches'.<sup>94</sup> In this manner, she is able to fight against her own subjugation and that of all other Kenyan women.

### Women's Conversations

For Boehmer, the voicing by Flora Nwapa of African women's community and conversations is significant. She proposes that it is indicative of Nwapa's literary subversion of the masculinist interpretations of African life written by postcolonial male authors since the 1950s. Thus, according to Boehmer, Nwapa's concentration upon what is either incidental or contextual in African male authored texts offers an alternative perspective and bears witness to the female gendered aspect of African communities that is marginalised and ignored by male writers.<sup>95</sup> It is apparent that the voicing of this women's world also occurs in Ogot's short story 'The Other Woman'.<sup>96</sup> Through Ogot's representation of conversations between African women, as well as female conversations with men, not only does the conflict of interest between the sexes become apparent, but also the female perspective is brought to the forefront as Ogot covertly establishes that African women do have voices.

Living within the context of a system that is inherently patriarchal means that African women have to negotiate alternative spaces for themselves. Ogot's insertion

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp.59-60.

<sup>95</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 95.

<sup>96</sup> Grace Ogot, 'The Other Woman', in *The Other Woman* (Nairobi: East African Educational, 1976; 1992), pp. 36 – 58.



of female vocality into 'The Other Woman' enables the construction of a female oral space that allows a renegotiation of women's identities as constructed by patriarchal systems within some societies in Africa. 'The Other Woman' is a seemingly moralistic story about a woman whose husband, unbeknown to her, is a serial adulterer. Jedidah, the protagonist of the story, is married to Jerry with whom she has two small children. She is 'highly educated' with a 'sophisticated look' and works as an Executive Secretary in Nairobi against the wishes of her husband, which causes friction within their relationship.<sup>97</sup> Her friend since childhood is Anna, and their conversations focus upon female affairs. Boehmer states that the benefit of female chatter and conversation is that:

[...] women share their woes and confirm female bonds, they also translate their lives into a medium which they control. The reader is made privy to the women representing and, in effect, recreating their lives in dialogue.<sup>98</sup>

Jedidah enters into a specifically female space by sharing her woes and concerns with Anna. They discuss matters like birth control and Jedidah's worries over the risk of getting thrombosis from taking the contraceptive pill and the notion that 'the coil caused prickly heat on a woman's birth canal'.<sup>99</sup> Family planning and/or the lack of it, is an issue that is an important part of many African women's daily experience but which is neglected in male authored texts. Furthermore, Ogot illustrates through Jerry that the male perspective regarding birth control and child rearing differs. Contraception is clearly not a male concern and Jerry does not worry about it with regards to either his wife or his extra marital affairs with the three successive *ayahs* who all become pregnant by him. Jerry's perspective is that his mother had eleven children to bring up and she managed. Yet, there is more going on here than the African male's disregard of contraception. He wants Jedidah to conform to the traditional construction of the African woman, bound by the chains of child rearing and domesticity. Voicing her concerns and talking to Anna, though, enables Jedidah to take command of her life and transform it into an environment over which she has more control. Anna tells Jedidah:

"You see, Jedy, to a man what makes a marriage stable and happy is not the good cooking of a wife or the meticulous way in which his house or clothes are kept. What matters to him most Jedidah is his sexual needs. A woman who satisfies

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<sup>97</sup> Ogot, *The Other Woman*, p.43.

<sup>98</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 98.

<sup>99</sup> Ogot, *The Other Woman*, p.37.

these needs is likely to have a happy and secure marriage. It is only then that a man will appreciate other things in the home.”<sup>100</sup>

As soon as Jedidah adopts the role of ‘willing and loving’ wife, rather than being restricted, she is able to penetrate an alternative space where she is happy and contented because her husband feels satisfied that she is conforming to his expectations.<sup>101</sup> The benefit to Jedidah, as long as she conforms, is that she has the agency to combine working outside of the home with looking after her children, overseeing the servants and running domestic matters.

Jedidah’s newest ayah, Taplalai, also finds a way of simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal expectations, but not through conversations with others of her gender, rather through conversing with Jerry. When Jerry makes a pass at Taplalai she does not behave in the passive and submissive manner he expects from an individual that is both female and in his employ. Instead:

Taplalai grabbed Jerry’s right hand and twisted it very hard. Jerry howled, and boxed her on the stomach with his left hand. But Taplalai refused to relent. Then looking Jerry straight in the face she said, “*Sasa, bwana, sis tunasemaa.*” (Now, bwana, we speak.)<sup>102</sup>

Refusing to remain silent, Taplalai uses her voice in order to retain her sense of self and to create a new space for herself through dialogue. Knowing that her master would take what he wanted from her in any case, she negotiates that they ‘don’t sleep on mama’s bed – we go to the guest room’ before insisting they agree on a price for the extra personal services he wishes her to give him.<sup>103</sup> In this manner, although Jerry is still perceived as having power and authority over Taplalai, by crowing, she has been able to enter a sphere where his male dominance is inhibited by her female agency.

By contrast, Macgoye adopts a different style in *The Present Moment* (1987).<sup>104</sup> Speaking about the African woman in male authored fiction, Boehmer writes that she ‘puts in an appearance chiefly in a metaphoric or symbolic role [...] but the presence of women in the nation has in many cases been officially marginalised and ignored.’<sup>105</sup> Far from ignoring women’s presence, Macgoye’s approach in *The Present Moment* is to interweave the life story of seven elderly

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.53.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>104</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *The Present Moment* (London: Heinemann; 1987).

<sup>105</sup> Boehmer, p. 91.



women now residing at 'the Refuge', a charitable home for the destitute elderly, in the Pumwani area of Nairobi. Taking account of the fact that African women are not merely one homogeneous mass, Macgoye depicts women from various ethnic backgrounds, which comprise Luo (Rahel), Gikuyu (Wairimu, Priscilla, and Bessie), Swahili (Sophia, formerly Fatuma), Luhya (Nekesa) and Seychelloise (Mimi Paul, nicknamed Mama Chungu). Hence, Roger Kurtz states that:

In *The Present Moment*, [...] the Refuge becomes a microcosm of Kenyan society, and although we can again trace the story of Kenya through the story of these women, the emphasis [...] is on how the women either experience political events or are affected by them, rather than symbolizing them in their lives.<sup>106</sup>

Writing what can be defined as 'faction' – fiction based on and rooted in historical events and fact - Macgoye represents 'the politics of female emotion' as the women's lives unfold through their dreams, flashbacks and recollections.<sup>107</sup> Although examples of textual interruption in the form of women's chatter are few, by writing about women and their consciousness, and re-presenting the marginalised female perspective, Macgoye crosses boundaries and moves into a narrative space previously occupied by males to recreate African women's identities. Altering the subjects of *The Present Moment* to female, as opposed to the male subjects that are so prevalent in male-authored fiction, Macgoye is able to disrupt masculinist texts through the destruction of African female stereotypes and the insertion of women's vocality and conversations. However, more obviously in this text she focuses on women's perspectives, hence enabling 'women [to] tell the story of their own experience'.<sup>108</sup> Hence, Wairimu says:

The stories we learned when we were children were all about big people – braver, stronger, fiercer, cleverer, even wicked, than anyone we knew. The ordinary people got passed off as hares or hyenas or birds. But if we knew the secrets of those little people, or the littleness of the big people – what they were afraid of, what they were mean over, what they wasted – then there would be the true story of our people.<sup>109</sup>

The African dominant discourse determines that African women are 'the little people' in relation to men, yet in *The Present Moment* Macgoye represents alternative stories of women and how they experience life and the events running up to *Uhuru*, and the aftermath of Independence in Kenya.

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<sup>106</sup> Roger Kurtz, *Nyarloka's Gift: The Writing of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye* (Nairobi: Mvulr Africa Publishers; 2005), p. 148.

<sup>107</sup> See Fay Weldon, on the dust jacket of *The Present Moment* by Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, (London: Heinemann; 1987).

<sup>108</sup> Boehmer, p. 95.

<sup>109</sup> Macgoye, *The Present Moment*, p.88.



Of the seven women whose stories unfold in *The Present Moment*, Wairimu is the most prominent and developed character. The novel opens with a flashback to Wairimu's girlhood that is rapidly succeeded by a flashback to Rahel's younger years. Immediately Macgoye presents the reader with two characters that conform to normative femininity in that their woodland excursions result from their involvement in the female tasks of collecting water and firewood. For Rahel, gathering firewood represents the opportunity to cross boundaries to cast off inhibitions and propriety, singing loudly and wildly the 'forbidden chants' that are frowned upon by the elders.<sup>110</sup> This is not representative of subversive or transgressive behaviour, however. Instead, it is an example of a deviation from normative femininity within a safe space that ensures that when the appropriate time arrives, the female knows and can perform 'the marriage songs and other forbidden chants'.<sup>111</sup> By contrast, Wairimu does subvert the order of things. Rather than conforming to the image of normative femininity or a common female stereotype, Wairimu is an autonomous African female preoccupied with attaining a position of agency for her self. Like Emily in Kimenye's *The Mating Game* (1992), Wairimu transgresses boundaries by losing her virginity before her wedding day, and not with the boy of her parents' choice. Thinking back to her first lover, Wairimu remembers:

[...] the gleaming rounded skin and the halo of sunlight encircling the young man with his shirt and shorts, his wide-brimmed hat and sandals, his knowledge of the world and other ways and women. That had been the start of it all, of her going away, because after this revelation of what he shared with her she could not face either the shameful disclosure of the wedding day or the cloying sameness of all the days that would follow. The forest was no longer thick enough to hide divergence. She had to go away.<sup>112</sup>

Wairimu's transgression is life changing, but not in the negative sense that her breach of the rules of normative feminine behaviour result in adverse consequences and punishment for her. This is because her liaison with Waitito leaves her feeling 'that she had touched a magic world and been left behind', the result of which is that her eyes are opened to alternative possibilities and choices that she had not previously considered.<sup>113</sup> Hence, although Wairimu cannot be regarded as having a voice within her community, she makes the choice to attempt to 'follow her rainbow' by going to

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp.2-3.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.17.



work on the coffee plantations.<sup>114</sup> Crossing geographical boundaries as well as those related to the position of the traditional African woman is the start of Wairimu's independence, which she attributes to Waitito. She states:

As I picked, I thought and thought, and I realised that this was the gift Waitito had given me in return for what he took from me. He had opened a door through which one could see picture after picture, more lively and colourful than the black, dead pictures which get on to each side of a page on a newspaper, and try oneself out on each, accepting or rejecting. Before there had been pictures – Wairimu, girl – Wairimu, bride – Wairimu, mother – Wairimu, elder's wife – Wairimu, grandmother – but nothing to choose between them, only to be chosen. And if one was not chosen to have a child then the pictures became very few indeed.<sup>115</sup>

Prior to Wairimu's encounter with Waitito, all she could envision was a life of normative femininity and the steady progression through the traditional life cycle of the African village woman. As a woman, she had been interpellated to conform and live without choice, but, paradoxically, Macgoeye illustrates that Wairimu's transgression with Waitito represents an opportunity to travel another path. Choosing the path of independence and paid employment, Wairimu reminisces that 'at the end of the month you got some money, and so you were like a man and could do a lot of choosing for yourself'.<sup>116</sup> Kurtz remarks upon Wairimu's sense of autonomy and independence stating that, 'she gradually but inexorably takes on positions and roles that are traditionally reserved for men.'<sup>117</sup> In Nairobi, using her voice to sing and attract the attention of Harry Thuku so that she can feel that she is a 'part of a new world' leads some of the crowd to try and undermine her for crowing, but Thuku is progressive enough to admire her independent spirit.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, she becomes like a man in the sense that she acquires the self assurance and confidence to reject the demands of the men she works with in favour of propositioning her boss's son whom she thinks will be able to help her 'follow her rainbow' and get her to Nairobi.<sup>119</sup> Ultimately in Wairimu, Macgoeye portrays an African woman that opts for 'the dowry of learning' and the associated sense of agency that accompanies it rather than a character that conforms to tradition by marrying the boy selected for her and settling down to life as a good wife and mother.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p.54.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>117</sup> Roger Kurtz, *Nyarloka's Gift: The Writing of Marjorie Oludhe Macgoeye* (Nairobi: Mvulr Africa Publishers; 2005), p. 156.

<sup>118</sup> Macgoeye, *The Present Moment*, p.23.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p.22.

With regard to Boehmer's notion of textual interruption, although examples do not abound in *The Present Moment*, it is apparent that women's society and interaction is important at the Refuge. Matron comments:

"The community has a strength of its own. Some of them have not much else left to live for."<sup>120</sup>

In the Refuge, Macgoye presents a society of women brought together through circumstances that leave them lacking a family in their old age and consequently a recognisable place or space in which to exist. Their strength lies in the fact that:

There was no need for tactful silences between them. The boundary of talk was where the lack of words or experience drew the line.<sup>121</sup>

Having lived through difficult times that they can recall, relive and discuss together, it is only lack of experience that can limit the women's communication. Thus, Boehmer's suggestion that women's discourse 'can be interpreted not only as a way of life but as a mode of self-making is made apparent in *The Present Moment*.<sup>122</sup>

Rahel's life story is not an uplifting or particularly happy tale, yet she says:

"Here I am in a home with one good leg and a number of grandchildren whom I hope I may be proud of. They have no reason to be ashamed of me."<sup>123</sup>

Recalling her experiences from her younger years allows Rahel to reflect upon her life and hence adopt a positive outlook about her current situation. More than this, though, it enables the reader to see the invalid Rahel, who 'had gone from them in all but name' in an entirely new light.<sup>124</sup> Not as aggressive in her quest for autonomy as Wairumu, Rahel, nevertheless, is one of 'those black women who stood up to their menfolk'.<sup>125</sup> Thus she makes her own choices after the death of her first husband. Subverting tradition, she refuses to marry any of her dead husband's relations, and proceeds to earn a living by selling fish until her accident sees her finally transferred to the Refuge.

### **Destruction of Female Stereotypes**

As indicated in Chapter 1, the construction of traditional African normative femininity establishes that the woman is subordinate to the man and that she is

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>122</sup> Boehmer, p. 98.

<sup>123</sup> Macgoye, *The Present Moment*, p.44.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p.115.



expected to marry and reproduce, and look after the home, *shamba*, and children. Consequently, the space normatively associated with her is the home: a private domestic space that imposes feminine behaviour and activity upon her. In *The Mating Game* (1992), Kimenye relates a tale set in Uganda that revolves around Marjorie's newly formed dating agency, 'The Friendship and Marriage Bureau'. In this text, Kimenye presents us with four female characters that deviate from the notions related to African normative femininity and who move towards the destruction of female stereotypes so prevalent in African fiction. Marjorie is the discontented housewife behind 'The Friendship and Marriage Bureau'; Emily is a client of the bureau and recently sacked from her job as manageress of 'Très Chic'; Lita is 'slim and pretty, but also a liar, a cheat and inclined to bully smaller girls at school'; and Selina is an abortionist.<sup>126</sup> As my analysis progresses it will become apparent that Kimenye engages in what Boehmer defines as temporal/territorial alteration through her representation of these characters and their (transgressive) female perspective.

Marjorie is a married woman disenchanted with her husband, Simon, and her life in general. The narrator states:

It was impossible for Marjorie to find in him [her husband] a trace of the amusing, dashing journalist who, three years earlier, had swept her off her feet. And she had been married to someone else at the time. Nowadays, she remembered her first husband, a wealthy business man, highly respected by all the right people, with a sneaking regret. What an outcry there had been when she ran away from him!<sup>127</sup>

From the outset, Kimenye presents us with a female character that conforms neither to the stereotypical Mother Africa figure nor to the image of silent and submissive African normative femininity. Rather, Marjorie's sense of autonomy has enabled her to begin a relationship whilst married to her first husband, face the scandal caused by walking away from that first marriage, and to re-marry a man of *her* choice. Ultimately, she can actively search for a way out of her second unhappy and unfulfilling marriage by starting up 'The Friendship and Marriage Bureau'.

Kimenye suggests that African men and European writers/critics are responsible for the perpetuation of the myth that constructs African women as silent, downtrodden and oppressed. She states 'they always give the idea that African women are sort of a silent presence - producing the food and staying in the background'.<sup>128</sup> Consequently, she is adamant about her rejection of any form of

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<sup>126</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *The Mating Game* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p.15 and p.23.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>128</sup> Unpublished Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye, 6 July 2006.



African feminism, believing it to be unnecessary, instead insisting that she has 'never met a downtrodden [African woman] yet.'<sup>129</sup> This is apparent in her depiction of Marjorie, who overtly transgresses boundaries of normative femininity by frequently challenging her husband about his shortcomings. In one outburst Marjorie storms:

'And what a prize you turned out to be!' Marjorie taunted him. 'You tell me how to run a house and buy decent food without money or a proper servant to help? You tell me how you'd like to be in this place alone all day, and then have a husband who comes staggering home to be sick all over the bathroom floor? Instead of laying down the law on things you know nothing about, isn't it time you learned to carry your drink?'<sup>130</sup>

In a culture where women's silence is widely accepted as the norm and the voicing of their opinions is regarded on a level with noise, to argue openly with her husband is transgressive indeed. Ifi Amadiume states:

Bad women were those who failed in their wifely and maternal duties and sentiments. Such a woman did not care for her husband, and was bad-tempered. [...] When her husband uttered one word, she uttered ten; she always fought him as if they were age-mates or equals. She always acted contrary to what her husband told her to do, and never heeded his presence. If her husband spoke out loud, she would scold him as if she were scolding a child.<sup>131</sup>

It must be noted that disparate African groups and cultures are not one homogenous mass that conform to the same set of ideological beliefs, yet while Amadiume above refers to the Igbo of Nigeria, she also highlights a traditional way of thinking that is widespread throughout many African cultures and countries. In fact, in this extract, Amadiume could even be describing the character of Marjorie, which highlights just how unconventional a character Kimenye is delineating. In traditional terms, Marjorie is to be regarded as a 'bad woman' since not only does she have no intentions of conforming to the 'wifely and maternal' ideal, but she shows no qualms about crowing in response to her husband, Simon, as loud as she is able. However, because he is interpellated by Ugandan/African traditional society to expect a subservient, obedient and quiet wife, who may occasionally massage his ego in an attempt to gain a level of autonomy, he variously 'lunge[s] at her across the table' and 'threaten[s] to wring her neck', which echoes the slaughter of the crowing hen

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Kimenye, *The Mating Game*, p.5.

<sup>131</sup> Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London; New Jersey: Zed Books; 1987, sixth impression 1998), p. 93.



discussed earlier.<sup>132</sup> In one scene he even grabs her wrist with one hand while striking her 'forcibly across the face' with the other.<sup>133</sup>

Disillusioned with the life she leads with Simon, and unwilling to conform to the expectations of African normative femininity, Marjorie stumbles across an article in a local newspaper claiming 'African society was falling apart because marriages were no longer arranged in the traditional manner'.<sup>134</sup> She has the idea of setting up 'The Friendship and Marriage Bureau'. To the European reader, the very thought of such a proposal is innocuous, and could even appear to be potentially a rather good business opportunity. However, in Uganda, and in many other African countries, Kimenye is rather more likely to be perceived as representing a strong female character unafraid of transgressing boundaries on a number of levels. In setting up a marriage bureau, Marjorie's concern is to earn an independent living that will enable her to support herself and leave her second husband, but she is simultaneously crossing boundaries that take her out of her normative domestic space of the home in order to move into an area where African men traditionally play the leading role. Her activities consequently provoke a response from the male Elders:

What right, the Elder wanted to know, had strangers to meddle in family affairs and fly in the face of established tradition?

The writer went on to say that he was proposing a meeting of all Clan Elders, to put a stop to this outrageous nonsense.<sup>135</sup>

By proposing to take control of the marriage arrangements, Marjorie is effectively suggesting that a female takes over the talking/crowing. However, Ugandan patriarchal society traditionally constructs this act as a male activity, as Tamale's metaphor illustrates so effectively. At the traditional Kiganda *Kwanjula* - an introduction or marriage ceremony - custom dictates that the males take on the role of speaking, including finalising the dowry and marriage agreement. Where the African male would have played the role of speaker and negotiator of dowry and marriage agreements, Marjorie attempts to take control.

In the end, however, Kimenye illustrates that Marjorie is not as strong and independently minded as one may first suspect. The reader has the fleeting feeling that Marjorie may be ultimately unconsciously searching for another man to support her when she decides to arrange a meeting with a male client who has aroused her

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<sup>132</sup> Kimenye, *The Mating Game*, p.6.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p.41.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p.19.

interest. The con artist, Prince John, easily turns her head and she quickly ‘reasoned that the prince offered an escape route from her domestic difficulties’.<sup>136</sup> Highlighting the female perspective, Kimenye shows that Marjorie, like June in Ogot’s ‘The Honourable Minister’,<sup>137</sup> dreams of a lifestyle far removed from the one provided by her husband. Rather, ‘her dream was of an elegant flat, a wardrobe crammed with beautiful clothes, and a dressing-table loaded with expensive perfumes and cosmetics instead of unpaid bills’.<sup>138</sup> May be this is why she so readily believes the trickster’s story that he is training to become a commercial airline pilot, and quickly conjures up ‘a cosy vision of herself and Prince John living together in luxury’.<sup>139</sup> Yet, the prince’s artful wooing of her soon results in an about turn and Marjorie’s claim that she would work hard in order to support him!<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, the negative response to the marriage bureau from the press, Clan elders, and politicians, who think that the business undermines the morals of Uganda,<sup>141</sup> leads Marjorie to rely on Simon to ‘take charge of events’ in an attempt to keep her name from being associated with the bureau as she finally spirals into madness.<sup>142</sup> Is this a sign from Kimenye that female chickens should not crow? Moreover, should Marjorie’s fate serve as a warning to other like-minded strong-willed females? Marjorie’s madness can certainly be regarded as a silencing and thwarting of her voice and hence a form of slaughter, but how do the other female characters in the text fare?

Emily is likewise represented as a transgressive and autonomous female with no interest in the normatively feminine activities of marriage, domesticity and childbearing. A further aspect of African normative femininity is that ‘a woman in her maidenhood should exercise self-control so as not to fall into the hands of men.’<sup>143</sup> As highlighted earlier in this chapter, Amadiume writes with specific reference to the Igbo but such traditional sentiments tend to be general throughout Africa rather than merely group/clan specific. Nevertheless, rather than modest and reserved, Kimenye portrays Emily as a female who dallied early on with boys

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>137</sup> Grace Ogot, *The Other Woman* (Nairobi: East African Educational; 1976, repr. 1992), pp. 79 – 118.

<sup>138</sup> Kimenye, *The Mating Game*, p.4.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.72.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.73.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.,p.40.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.,p.121.

<sup>143</sup> Amadiume, p. 94.



resulting in a teenage pregnancy 'in her first term at secondary school'.<sup>144</sup> Such behaviour can be viewed, by Kimenye's African audience in particular, as passing beyond the boundaries of normative behaviour for a respectable female, and therefore will be regarded as very unacceptable by the majority of readers. This is confirmed by Amadiume who states that African 'culture stigmatized pregnancy before marriage, [and] the socialization of girls stressed sexual restraint and preparation for their future roles as wives and mothers.'<sup>145</sup> Yet focalized from the point of view of Emily, there is a certain ambiguity surrounding the fate of the child as all that is stated is that maybe it was a mistake for her not to have 'kept the child'.<sup>146</sup> This suggests that rather than giving birth and leaving the child to be brought up with her parents or grandparents as sometimes occurs on these occasions Emily resorted to an illegal termination: a further transgression of boundaries. Emily's crossing of borders does not end here, however. We discover that in her attempt to retain some sense of liberty and independence she ran away to Mombassa with a Kenyan man. Once there she is obviously enterprising enough to land a job in the fashion industry, but her bold approach towards the borrowing of expensive dresses turns out once again to be too transgressive, and she loses her job.<sup>147</sup> When Emily returns to Uganda she works as the manager of Très Chick, where her natural intelligence and good business sense shine through. However, after crowing too loud and becoming involved in an argument with a minister's wife over her account of a faulty dress, her employer sacks her. After this latest knock to her confidence, Emily fleetingly thinks, as does Marjorie, that the support of a man may solve all her problems. However, for Emily, this thought is quickly dispelled when she finds herself a new job:

She was no longer very clear as to her exact motives for enrolling with The Friendship and Marriage Bureau, now that she had another job and things seemed to be going her way. The low spirits which had dogged her on the morning that she noticed the Bureau's advertisement belonged to another age, another Emily.<sup>148</sup>

Faced with the prospect of no job to support her, Emily's gut instinct is to conform to normative feminine behaviour and to look for a man/husband to provide for her. However, she quickly walks into a new job and her old self-confidence and autonomy return, as illustrated when she says to Nakasana:

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<sup>144</sup> Kimenye, *The Mating Game*, p.29.

<sup>145</sup> Amadiume, p. 94.

<sup>146</sup> Kimenye, *The Mating Game*, p.29.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p.88.

“Child,” [...] “for a child is all you are. Put that nonsense of marriage being an escape route out of your head. [...] You have the chance to make something of yourself, even if you doubt you are university material.”<sup>149</sup>

Emily’s journey through life has not been smooth, but her tenacity and strong will has enabled her to retain her dignity and independence, hence she tries to reassure Nakasana that there are other paths than marriage and domesticity for women and it is important to follow them in order to attain a sense of self. Emily’s confidence and sense of self is particularly apparent in the manner she displays when she is in the company of men, and in some ways her behaviour is reminiscent of the character of Maria in *Kalasanda*. Her relaxed demeanour is evident when she is unexpectedly picked up in the hotel bar by Prince John, as well as when she willingly continues to drink and then leave with Willie even after she discovers that he is not actually her blind date, William Serumba. Like Maria, there is a sense that Emily is not afraid to cross boundaries relating to the African woman’s identity: if it feels good to Emily, she goes right on ahead and does it. However, her transgressive sense of independence comes to an abrupt halt when Marjorie murders her in the final stages of her insanity. Kimenye’s portrayal of Marjorie and Emily is of strong, independently-minded women, but both characters are silenced in the end. Is Kimenye trying to teach her readers something? Kiguli believes she is not a writer who sets out to teach, but in representing women like Marjorie and Emily, who are exiated for crowing, we have to consider whether Kimenye is suggesting that patriarchy does win on occasions and this is what can happen to women who transgress too far.

Lita, although still a schoolgirl, is a character that is learning to manipulate by means of what could be defined as nego-feminism at an early age. The narrator states:

In the company of others, Lita constantly expressed her gratitude to her aunt and uncle for taking care of her during the absence of her parents. She made a big pretence of being helpful around the house, and heaped coals of fire on Nakasana’s head by being the soul of patience whenever Nakasana showed dislike of her cousin.

Her personality completely changed when she and Nakasana were alone.<sup>150</sup>

Lita understands the sense in conforming to the behaviour that is expected of a child and a female. Speaking of the place of children in Uganda culture, Kiguli says, ‘it’s a

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp.45-46.



culture where the children are seen and not heard, and when a child does something you say “you’re just a child.”<sup>151</sup> Lita apparently accepts her position of silent, obedient and oppressed child, but in this manner she is able to make use of her space to gain control and power over her life. By being realistic and seeming to play the game, Lita is able to deflect her guardians’ interest away from activities she wants to keep private. In her discussion of women’s subordination, Kiguli states that ‘the only way to get out of it is not to fight because if you fight society sees you in a way as the weaker person and you will be crushed.’<sup>152</sup> Lita does not fight. Rather she deals with the space that she occupies, and decides that the way for her to survive and get her own way is to pretend to play the traditional role. Showing similarities to Maria, she deviates from African normative femininity by using her body as a further way of gaining control over her life. Taking a fancy to Aston, the family servant:

Lita found excuses to call at the servants’ quarters. Sometimes it was to ask Aston to check the brakes on her bike, at others Lita sought him out to sharpen a pencil or unscrew the top off a bottle of the clear varnish which she painted on her fingernails.<sup>153</sup>

Lita shows no inclination to follow traditional protocol regarding being introduced to, and forming a relationship with a member of the opposite sex. In fact, Aston’s lowly status within the family would make such a meeting impossible in any case, and acts as a further indicator of Lita’s level of transgression. It seems, however, that Lita is aware that she lives in an environment that wants to control her, both as a female and as a minor, and hence her developed sense of independence encourages her into ‘a habit of slipping away to visit the servants’ quarters in the middle of the night’.<sup>154</sup> Ultimately, Lita takes control of her destiny, and in the process causes controversy and embarrassment for her extended family, by running away with Aston. Interestingly, this particular female escapes before she is slaughtered.

Perhaps the character that goes the farthest towards destroying popular stereotypes of African womanhood is Selina, ‘the rosary recit[ing]’ abortionist.<sup>155</sup> Selina has a ‘round honest face [that] reflected a wealth of understanding and tolerance of human weakness’.<sup>156</sup> In fact, Kimenye portrays Selina as ‘the picture of

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<sup>151</sup> Unpublished interview between Susan Kiguli and Elizabeth Oldfield, 17 March 2008.

<sup>152</sup> Unpublished interview between Susan Kiguli and Elizabeth Oldfield, 17 March 2008.

<sup>153</sup> Kimenye, *The Mating Game*, pp.46-47.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p.94.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.94.



respectability in her dark blue *busuti* with striped silk sash'.<sup>157</sup> Hence, when Marjorie meets her in jail she vaguely 'wondered what such a nice woman was doing in a police cell'.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, when the truth finally dawns, Marjorie is horrified. As a seemingly practising Catholic who has been leading the contralto section of the choir at St Lwanga's Church for many years, Selina crosses boundaries laid down by the Catholic Church, which condemns abortion as evil. Furthermore, the depiction of Selina enables Kimenye, through her role of female storyteller, to attain a certain power through the voicing of a particularly radical and transgressive issue because in Uganda, abortion is illegal. The 'Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat' state that in Uganda:

the performance of abortion is generally prohibited. Any person who, with intent to procure the miscarriage of a woman, unlawfully administers any noxious thing or uses any means is subject to imprisonment for fourteen years. A pregnant woman who undertakes the same act or consents to its performance is subject to seven years' imprisonment.<sup>159</sup>

Within her apparently light-hearted story aimed at teenagers and young adults, Kimenye embeds a covert discussion on the lack of women's rights in Uganda. Due to the restrictions surrounding women's attainment of a legal termination, illegal and consequently unsafe abortions are common resulting in a high level of maternal complications and deaths. Nevertheless, defending her chosen occupation, Selina states:

"I prefer to think of myself as a social worker [...]. If everyone had her rights, I'd be employed by the Family Planning Association. Instead of locking me in here, the government should be honouring me for helping to control the population explosion!"<sup>160</sup>

Kimenye uses her role to crow and raise awareness of both the high fertility level in Uganda and the lack of rights available to women, thereby becoming involved in the politics of abortion. Rape, incest, foetal impairment, economic or social reasons are

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p.94.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.95.

<sup>159</sup> Source: 'Background', Population Policy Data Bank maintained by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, <<http://www.un.org.esa/population/publications/abortion/doc/uganda.doc>> [accessed 22 May 2009] (para. 1 of 6). See also 'The Incidence of Induced Abortion in Uganda' by Susheela Singh, Elena Prada, Florence Mirembe and Charles Kiggundu in *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 31:4 (December 2005), 183 – 191. Singh et al highlight that abortion in Uganda is only permitted if the pregnancy endangers a woman's life, but that legal abortions are rare due to restrictions and level of approval required to carry out the procedure. Before a legal abortion can be performed the consent of two registered physicians is required.

<sup>160</sup> Kimenye, *The Mating Game*, p.95.



not considered to constitute adequate grounds on which to permit abortion.<sup>161</sup> Thus, in a country where only 8% of married women were using modern contraception in 1995 (just three years after the publication of *The Mating Game*) unsafe abortion is a very real concern and claims the lives of many women each year. Yet despite the practice being illegal, and because Ugandan women have no voice and no rights in relation to their own body, it is not uncommon for women who do not use modern contraceptive methods to prevent unwanted pregnancies to undergo more than one termination should they survive the first procedure they undergo. This very short depiction of Selina, who has managed to escape being slaughtered for crowing, provides Kimenye with the opportunity to assume a position of power and to voice an alternative view of the role that the illegal abortionist plays in African culture. Furthermore, Selina highlights the need for better family planning education and addresses the issue of a patriarchal environment that attempts to prevent women having the autonomy to make informed choices about their bodies, health and well-being.

### **A More Holistic Approach to Feminism?**

As 'African' female writers, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot have a voice, but in order to achieve recognition they have to crow louder and about alternative issues than their male counterparts do. Storytelling traditionally offers women a public space to speak, but Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot's privileged socio-economic status also plays a part in the wide audience they are able to reach. Furthermore, it also offers them the opportunity to subvert the 'natural' order of things and crow about topics other than traditional myths and legends. This chapter has made clear that there is a feminist element in the fiction of these female writers, yet they do not wish to identify themselves with the various African feminisms that exist. An argument could be formulated to suggest that their determination not to recognise and align themselves with a position that has been radicalised by African men wishing to intimidate women regarding women's liberation is the reason for their continued denial of feminist concerns and issues. However, it appears clear to me that these

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<sup>161</sup> Source: 'Background', Population Policy Data Bank maintained by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, <<http://www.un.org.esa/population/publications/abortion/doc/uganda.doc>> [accessed 22 May 2009]

female writers, while obviously preoccupied with the well being of women, are not concerned with women's rights. This statement sounds contradictory. However, the notion of women's rights carries with it implications of a particular political sphere, whereas the notion of the championing of women's well being offers far broader dimensions and a more holistic approach that takes account of the whole of the community, both female and male. These writers may disagree with the term nego-feminist if applied individually to them, but it seems apparent that all African women, even all women worldwide, often use sophisticated and subtle forms of negotiation. Such an approach offers a more subtle form of feminism, particularly in societies where it is not regarded as the woman's place to speak out or display signs of agency.



## 5. Creative Dialogues, Signification, Gender and Space: Talking through Contemporary Children's Stories

The focus of this chapter is on Kimenye and Macgoye's writing for children and young adults and their subsequent transgression of boundaries through the process of Signifyin(g) therein. However, it is pertinent to begin with an analysis of the literary and publishing context out of which their writing arises. Thereafter, I focus on how they employ children's stories as a way of finding a voice and identity for the woman writer, while both conforming to and subverting their normative position as an African female.

### Situating Kimenye and Macgoye in the East African Literary and Publishing Context

I had often seen my master and Dick employed in reading; and I had great curiosity to talk to the books, as I thought they did; and so to learn how all things had a beginning; for that purpose I have often taken up a book, and have talked to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me; and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent.<sup>1</sup>

The most obvious interpretation of Olaudah Equiano's statement relates to his naivety in believing that the act of reading for Europeans involves an exchange of dialogue between text and reader. Yet, it can also be interpreted as signifying that African readers and writers are unable to discover any recognisable self or environment in books written by European writers.

With regard to what was once considered the somewhat radical notion of Africans participating in the act of writing, during his school years, Kenyan writer and publisher David G. Maillu was so unsure about such a prospect that he remembers asking his teacher if it was possible. The potentially disillusioning response was that his teacher thought he had once read a book written by a West African.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Bernth Lindfors opens his collection of interviews with East African writers, publishers, editors and scholars, *Mazungumzo* (1976), with the reflection that 'twenty

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<sup>1</sup> Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, ed. by Vincent Carretta, (Harmondsworth: Penguin; 1995 [1794]), p.68.

<sup>2</sup> David G. Maillu interviewed on 4 August 1976 by Bernth Lindfors, 'Interview with David G. Maillu', in *Mazungumzo: Interviews with East African Writers, Publishers, Editors and Scholars* (Athens; Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1980), 64 – 73 (p. 64).



years ago East Africa was considered a literary desert.’<sup>3</sup> Maillu confirms this, saying that before the 1970s, while some writers tried to get published, ‘it was assumed that only English people wrote.’<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Nancy Schmidt states: ‘before the decade of African independence in the 1960s, almost all literature for African children was published in Europe.’<sup>5</sup> This state of affairs continued into the 1970s to the extent that Grace Ogot considered African centred junior readers to be ‘badly needed to break through the Enid Blyton collections so entrenched in the market’.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Simon Gikandi confirms that when he was at school in East Africa during the early 1970s, although Kimenye’s readers were by then available, ‘the normal literary fare for junior secondary school English [...] consisted of a good dose of abridged Robert Louis Stevenson novels [and] Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare*’.<sup>7</sup> Meena Khorana explains the reason for this as one of assimilation since prior to independence it was the practice of the colonisers to import European texts into the colonies. Khorana argues that ‘these books advanced the colonial agenda through stereotypical plots, characterization, and themes.’<sup>8</sup> During the colonial period, in order to interpellate Africans into a Eurocentric way of thinking, the colonisers chose to ignore or forget all forms of African civilisation<sup>9</sup> - the variety of impressive dwellings, sanitation, and systems of law for example that existed – in preference to imagining and fantasising Africa. In his essay ‘The Language of African Literature’, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o highlights Europeans’ construction of themselves as superior to the inferior African ‘Other’ and how, as a way of gaining control over Africans, they forbade the use of indigenous languages in colonial schools because language acts as a carrier of

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<sup>3</sup> Bernth Lindfors, *Mazungumzo: Interviews with East African Writers, Publishers, Editors and Scholars* (Athens; Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1980) in Arlene A. Elder, ‘English-Language Fiction from East Africa’, in *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures*, ed. by Oyekan Owomoyela (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska, 1993), pp. 49 – 84 (p. 49).

<sup>4</sup> Maillu, p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy J. Schmidt, ‘African Women Writers of Literature for Children’, in *World Literature Written in English*, 17:1 (1978), 7 – 21 (p. 7).

<sup>6</sup> Bernth Lindfors, ‘Interview with Grace Ogot’, in *World Literature Written in English*, 18 (1979) 56 – 68 (p. 67). This interview is also published in Bernth Lindfors, (ed.), *Mazungumzo: Interviews with East African Writers, Publishers, Editors and Scholars* (Athens; Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Simon Gikandi, ‘Chinua Achebe and the Invention of African Culture’, in *Research in African Literatures*, 32:3 (Fall 2001), 3 – 8 (p. 3).

<sup>8</sup> Meena Khorana, ‘Children’s Publishing in Africa: Can the Colonial past be Forgotten?’, in *Critical perspectives on Postcolonial African Children’s and Young Adult Literature* ed. by Meena Khorana (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood, 1998), 1 – 13 (p. 2).

<sup>9</sup> *Africa: The Story of a Continent*, written and presented by Basil Davidson. (Chicago: Home Vision. 1984)



culture.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, that the imposition of European languages divorces Africans from their history and heritage is a fact also acknowledged by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952).<sup>11</sup> The notion of the African 'Other' was further reinforced by the literature that a Eurocentric English education prescribed as suitable reading matter. Canonical texts by writers like Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, William Shakespeare and Henry Rider Haggard bore no relation to the experiences of an African child growing up in Africa: the culture, landscapes and situations were all alien. As a result, Africans became divorced from themselves and their world in the attempt to perceive themselves and the world as defined by a Eurocentric education. Arlene A. Elder notes that some of the earliest East Africans to have works published in English were graduates from colonial mission schools who received their education in Britain or America: they produced anthropological or autobiographical texts, rather than creative fictional texts as encouraged by their Western supporters.<sup>12</sup> Hence, much of the early East African writing in English was first published and sold in London prior to paper-back editions being sold on the African market. Kimenye, who states that at the time she wrote *Kalasanda* she cannot recall any publishing houses in Uganda for literary works of fiction written in English, and that Oxford University Press, London, published her text by chance, reinforces this fact.<sup>13</sup> However, Maillu notes that even so, it was difficult for African writers writing in English to get published because of the colonial attitude of publishing houses. He states:

The African was hardly given any chance. Those who wanted to be published had to be published outside East Africa in a place like London, and English people had their own way of assessing African writers. I mean, you couldn't publish anything because they thought it was not right for Africans to publish anything. To be published by them, you had to write in a certain way, in a certain style, and depict the African image that they liked.<sup>14</sup>

The earliest writing from this region was therefore unable to promote overtly an African centred perspective, as this was not in the interests of the colonial system.

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<sup>10</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 'The Language of African Literature', in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) pp. 35 – 44.

<sup>11</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Arlene A. Elder, 'English-Language Fiction from East Africa', in *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures*, ed. by Oyekan Owomoyela (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska, 1993), pp. 49 – 84 (p. 49).

<sup>13</sup> In an unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye on 6 July 2006, Kimenye tells how *Kalasanda* was, by chance, passed on to John Nagenda to read who was at that time working for OUP. Within a month Kimenye received a letter of acceptance for her collection of short stories.

<sup>14</sup> Maillu, p.64-5.



Furthermore, the intended audience was dual as it was produced primarily for an international audience before finally finding its way onto the African market. Anthropological, historical and autobiographical works were therefore able to record aspects of traditional African culture while simultaneously appealing to European readers because of the interest such texts generated due to their exotic location.

Elder offers an extensive analysis of the English language literary and publishing opportunities in East Africa in her essay 'English-Language Fiction from East Africa.'<sup>15</sup> Examples of the earliest published texts from this region are *Uganda's Katikiro in England* (1904), *An African Speaks for His People* (1934), and *Story of an African Chief* (1934), which was republished as *Africa Answers Back* (1935) and *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938). *Uganda's Katikiro in England*, by Ham Mukasa, was originally written in Luganda (prior to translation in 1975 by Taban lo Liyong) and focuses on the visit by Uganda's official representative, Sir Apolo Kagwa, to the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902. Both *An African Speaks for His People* by Parmenas Githendu Mockerie and *Africa Answers Back* by Akiki K. Nyabongo are autobiographical. Mockerie was one of the earliest students at Makerere, while Nyabongo was a Munyoro prince from Toro who attended Yale, Harvard and Oxford University, before gaining his Ph.D. in 1940. *Africa Answers Back* offers an insight into the life of the elite in the kingdom of Toro, but it is significant in that it is possible to detect Nyabongo's disapproval of the Eurocentrism of the European government officials and missionaries in Uganda. Similarly, in Jomo Kenyatta's anthropological text about the Gikuyu, *Facing Mount Kenya*, he highlights the inability of the European rulers to empathise with this particular society.<sup>16</sup> Okot p'Bitek's poem, *Lak Tar* (1953), written in the indigenous Acoli and making use of the traditional oral form was the next text from East Africa to be published. This was followed by Kenyan, John Mbiti's collection of stories *M. and his Story* (1954) and his short story 'Wavata and the Iimu' (1960), published in the English edition of *Presence Africaine*, and Muga Gicaru's semi-autobiographical *Land of Sunshine: Scenes of Life in Kenya before Mau Mau* (1958).<sup>17</sup>

A brief glance at Barbara Abrash's *Black African Literature in English Since 1952: Works and Criticism* (1967) highlights that West African writers such as

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<sup>15</sup> Elder, pp. 49 – 84.

<sup>16</sup> Elder, p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> See Barbara Abrash, *Black African Literature in English Since 1952: Works and Criticism* (New York; London: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967).



Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka dominate the development of the Anglophone African novel.<sup>18</sup> Yet East Africa has produced some of the most important examples of the modern African novel. Kenyan writer and critic, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, is regarded as one of 'the true giants of modern African literature', along with Achebe and Soyinka. With the advent of independence in the 1960s, the focus of literature written in English in East Africa began to evolve from the type of historical, autobiographical and anthropological texts referred to above and to include creative and imaginative fiction: a development attributed to Makerere University. Elder comments:

The single most significant educational force behind this development was Uganda's Makerere University College in Kampala, which had been established in 1939 to provide higher education for all of British East Africa: Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika, and Zanzibar.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, M. Keith Booker agrees that Makerere played a 'crucial role' in the birth of 'modern East African literature.'<sup>20</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o himself was a student at Makerere during the early 1960s, and it was at this time that he began to think seriously about writing. East African writers were rare; however, in 1962, the African Writers Conference was held in Kampala, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, along with Ogot attended. Elder observes that this lack or absence of East African writers resulted in 'a profound sense of inadequacy and resolve on the part of young writers at Makerere'.<sup>21</sup> Below is an insight into the first publications from East African writers following the conference:

- Kariuki, Josiah Nwangi, Kenya

*Mau Mau Detainee: the Account by a Kenya African of his Experiences in Detention Camps, 1953-1960*, (autobiography).  
(London: OUP, 1963)

- Mboya, Tom, Kenya

*Freedom and After* (essay)  
(London: Deutsch, 1963)  
(Boston: Little, Brown, 1963)

- Ngũgĩ, James, Kenya

*The Black Hermit* (drama)  
(Makerere University Press, 1963)

- Ngũgĩ, James, Kenya

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Elder, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> M. Keith Booker, *The African Novel in English: An Introduction* (Oxford: James Curry, 1998), p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Elder, p. 52.

*Weep Not Child* (novel)  
(London: Heinemann, 1964)

- Gatheru, R. Mugo, Kenya  
*Child of Two Worlds: A Kikuyu's Story*, (autobiography).  
(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964)

- Cook, David, (ed.)  
*Origin East Africa* (anthology)  
(London: Heinemann, 1965)  
Comprising works by:  
Tom Chacha (Tanzania), Joseph Gatuiria (Kenya), Gabriel Gicogo (Kenya), Michael Kaggwa (Uganda), Solomon Kagwe (Kenya), Jonathan Kariara (Kenya), Joseph E. Kariuki (Kenya), Cuthbert Khunga (Malawi), Violet Kokunda (Uganda), Ben Mkapa (Tanzania), Joseph G. Mutiga (Kenya), John Nagenda (Uganda), Peter Nazareth (Uganda), N.G. Ngulukulu (Tanzania), James Ngũgĩ (Kenya), Joseph Waiguru (Kenya) and Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu (Uganda).

- Denny, Neville, (ed.)  
*Pan African Short Stories* (anthology)  
(London: Nelson, 1965)  
Including works by:  
Grace Ogot (Kenya), John Nagenda (Uganda), and Tom Chacha (Tanzania).

- Ngũgĩ, James, Kenya  
*The River Between* (novel)  
(London: Heinemann, 1965)

- Kayira, Legson, Malawi  
*I Will Try*, (autobiography).  
(London: Longmans, 1965)  
(Garden City: Doubleday, 1965)

- Njau, Rebecca, Kenya  
*The Scar: a Tragedy in One Act*  
(Moshi, Tanzania: Kibo Art Gallery, 1965)

- Kimenye, Barbara, Uganda  
*Kalasanda*, (short story collection)  
(London: OUP, 1965)

- Kimenye, Barbara, Uganda  
*Kalasanda Revisited*, (short story collection)  
(London: OUP, 1966)

- Liyong, Taban lo, Uganda  
'The Education of Taban lo Liyong' (autobiographical fiction)  
*Transition*, V:24 (1966) 12-19



- Ogot, Grace, Kenya  
*The Promised Land* (novel)  
(Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966)
- Okot, p'Bitek, (Uganda)  
*Song of Lawino* (English translation of *Lak Tar*)  
(Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967)
- Ngũgĩ, James, Kenya  
*A Grain of Wheat* (novel)  
(London: Heinemann, 1967)
- Asalache, Khadambi, Kenya  
*A Calabash of Life*, (novel)  
(London: Longmans, 1967)<sup>22</sup>

This list serves as an indication of how writers from this region address the problem of 'literary barrenness in East Africa'.<sup>23</sup> What is clear, however, is that these writers are not one homogenous mass but fall into a number of different categories or genres. Prevalent still, and acting as a link between works published pre- and post-independence is the autobiographical text by Kariuki, Mboya, Gatheru, Kayira and Liyong, which offer varying accounts of the lives of indigenous Africans including tribal upbringing, encounters with the West, and experiences related to the fight for independence. The remaining works fall into the categories of: elitist writing, indigenous language, drama, short stories and novels. Writing back to colonialism in an overtly political style and focusing on colonialism's impact upon Kenya, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's novels are an example of elitist African writing.

Making a link with the East African novel and the African oral tradition is p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, which legitimises both the use of traditional orature and its transition into the textual medium. *Song of Lawino* is p'Bitek's translation of his earlier published indigenous language poem, *Lak Tar*, wherein he employs stereotypical images of African women in his endeavour to represent the conflict between traditional and modern culture. Although Abrash's bibliography focuses upon works published in English, Abasi Kiyimba observes that a considerable number

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<sup>22</sup> This list of publications was compiled with reference to Abrash.

<sup>23</sup> Grace Ogot talking to Bernth Lindfors, 'Interview with Grace Ogot', in *World Literature Written in English*, 18 (1979) 56 – 68 (p. 67). This interview is also published in Bernth Lindfors, (ed.), *Mazungumzo: Interviews with East African Writers, Publishers, Editors and Scholars* (Athens; Ohio: Ohio University Centre for International Studies, 1980).

of indigenous language publications also appeared written in Luganda at this time.<sup>24</sup> These fictional and non-fictional literary works, published from as early as 1951, offer an invaluable insight into Baganda culture and traditions.<sup>25</sup> However, because the audience is restricted by the choice of language, either publication was undertaken by the authors themselves; small indigenous publishing houses which existed alongside the English ones like Uganda Bookshop, Mill Hill Missionaries or Uganda Publishing House, all of Kampala; or the larger East African Literary Bureau, or Longman Uganda or Kenya.

Likewise, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Njau's dramas are published locally but possibly due to the relevancy of the storylines to the intended (African) audience. In his first major drama, *The Black Hermit* (1962), wa Thiong'o (James Ngũgĩ) brings the African village to the stage. Similarly, the focus of Njau's play, *The Scar: a Tragedy in One Act* (1956), is on a woman who does not fit the construct of either colonial or traditional African normative femininity and who traverses boundaries related to traditional custom by challenging her brothers for the family's inheritance.

East African writers, whose short stories were published in anthologies like *Origin East Africa*, stood a greater chance of achieving international recognition than if they merely appeared in print in the various journals that were current in the region at that time. While *Origin East Africa* is not comprised specifically of works written by East African writers but rather offers an anthology of works that were written in that area, the text is made up of contributions from the first issues of *Penpoint*, a Makerere University published journal that gave students the chance to get their works into print. Taban lo Liyong defines David Cook's anthology as follows:

Most of the contributions in the Cook collection fall into the categories of "an incident which took place in my village" or "a story my grandmother once told me." Some deal with clashes between tradition and superstition on the one hand and Christianity and modern pragmatism on the other. But when these writers deal with the passing of the old ways, they do not adopt the sentimentality and nostalgia so characteristic of the negritude school.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Abasi Kiyimba, Makerere University, 21 March 2008.

<sup>25</sup> For further information relating to published Luganda books between 1951 and 1985 see James Ssemakula, *Luganda Book Reviews* <http://www.buganda.com/bitabo.htm#book24> accessed 2 July 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Taban lo Liyong, 'Review' in *Africa Report* (November 1965), also reprinted in *The Last Word* by Taban lo Liyong (Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1969), pp. 183-186.



Hence, in many of the short stories that appear in *Origin East Africa* it is possible to begin to get a glimpse of African society and culture and a move towards a more African centric perspective.

Khambi, Kimenye and Ogot make up the novelists' genre published in Abrash's bibliography. Just as Ogot draws inspiration from traditional Luo ways and customs for her novel, *The Promised Land*, Khambi's work of fiction is inspired by and set in pre-colonial Kenya. However, unlike Ogot, Khambi has been criticised for his Eurocentric style of writing. Valerie D'Cruz states, 'for the most part the language of the characters remains artificial and static – they converse and even express their deepest emotions like a bunch of conservative Englishmen might be expected to and in a similar style.'<sup>27</sup> By contrast, Kimenye's style of writing is very different. Her two short story collections, *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited*, have been heralded as 'striking, particularly with the passage of time, as radically different from the mood and format of the early publications in that region.'<sup>28</sup> Likewise, the above record gives an indication of others who were writing in English during the 1960s, but Kiyimba notes that 'they were very different.'<sup>29</sup> A writer who achieved publication shortly after Abrash's *Black African Literature in English Since 1952* is Robert Serumaga. His *Return to the Shadows* was published in 1969. Writing about military coups, Kiyimba refers to Serumaga's fiction as 'prophetic' since at the time he wrote no coups had yet taken place in Uganda. Both his and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's politically committed writing sets them aside from Kimenye. A further notable difference is that although Serumaga's social and literary base is Luganda and the Baganda people, his focus is upon the conflict between Buganda and the wider Uganda. Yet Kimenye's writing is notably different, not solely because she consciously adopts an African centred perspective, as detailed in Chapter 2, but because she combines this point of view with a different style of writing that engages the reader. Her unique style of writing that is in evidence in *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited*, and the success she achieved with these texts is such that some critics consider that Davis Sebukima and Godfrey Kalimugogo are influenced by her

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<sup>27</sup> Valerie D'Cruz in Janheinz Jahn, Ulla Schild & Almut Nordman, *Who's Who in African Literature: Biographies, Works, Commentaries* (Tubingen: Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1972), p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> J. Bardolph, *Literature Online*

<http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=R0079093edivLevel=0&queryId=> [accessed 10 October 2005]

<sup>29</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Abasi Kiyimba.



and draw upon her style in their own writing. Hence, George Heron comments that both the earlier *Kalasanda* novels and Sebukima's *Son of Kabira* depict:

Isolated, self-sufficient and conservative Ganda villages that have absorbed the slow social changes of the colonial period without the kind of traumas described by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o on the one hand or Okot p'Bitek on the other.<sup>30</sup>

The similarity between the texts does not stop here, as there is a strong sense that Sebukima endeavours to emulate Kimenye's distinctive style and tone. Consequently, Heron observes that Sebukima's:

[...] description of village life in *A Son of Kabira* is strongly reminiscent of Barbara Kimenye: there is the same gentle satire and the same slightly patronizing affection, and Kabira village comes to life just as fully as Kalasanda.<sup>31</sup>

Kalimugogo, possibly best known for his *Trials and Tribulations in Sandu's Home* (1976), is, apart from Kimenye, the most prolific Ugandan writer of the 1970s. His familiar focus is on cultural conflict due to the meeting of pre-colonial traditional African society with white European society and notions. Yet, as with Sebukima, he appears to be similarly encouraged by Kimenye's writing, as George Odera Outa points out that, like Kimenye, he employs comic situations in his social commentary.<sup>32</sup>

### Writing for Children

What is notable about the above publishing history and taxonomy of genres is, that with the exception of Kimenye's *Kalasanda* and *Kalasanda Revisited*, which are readily accessible to older children and young adults or youths, there appears to be an absence of published texts in English by East African writers for African children.

Jay Heale states:

The "wild animal safari" has become the cliché of East African children's books. Usually published in England, such stories perpetuated Africa as a land full of animals. Willard Price continued the genre with *Safari Adventure* (1966) and *Lion Adventure* (1967).<sup>33</sup>

Like Huxley's *The Flame Trees of Thika* and *The Mottled Lizard*, discussed in Chapter 2, such Eurocentric texts perpetuate European literary stereotypes of Africa

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<sup>30</sup> George Heron, 'Uganda', in *European-language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Vol. 2, ed. by Albert S. Gérard (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 922 – 948 (p. 930).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 931.

<sup>32</sup> George Odera Outa, 'Kalimugogo, Godfrey', in *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, Simon Gikande, ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 356.

<sup>33</sup> Jay Heale, 'East Africa', in *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, ed. by Peter Hunt & Sheila G. Bannister Ray (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 790.



and Africans. Thus Africa is represented as the Dark Continent, and Africans the uncivilised 'Other'. The consequences of texts of this nature being the staple reading material for African children is that not only are they irrelevant to African children, but they interpellate them to regard themselves and their culture as 'Other'. Heale further highlights that, 'such previous English-colonial countries as Uganda and Tanzania rely mostly on imported children's books.'<sup>34</sup> This fact is made apparent in Schmidt's bibliographies, *Children's Books on Africa and their Authors: An Annotated Bibliography* (1975) and *Supplement to Children's Books on Africa and their Authors: An Annotated Bibliography* (1979). Schmidt's texts include a précis of each listed work along with brief biographical details of the author, clearly indicating that in East Africa particularly, only a small percentage of texts published are by indigenous African writers.<sup>35</sup> The very absence of published indigenous African writings leads Grace Ogot in her 1968 article 'The African Writer', to reach the following conclusion:

[...] suitable children's literature is almost non-existent in the three East African countries. Parents and teachers have to rely on odd assortments from Europe and America. Here is a challenge to African authors.<sup>36</sup>

Of the Kenyan writers publishing stories for African children during this period the more well known are Asenath Odaga (*The Angry Flames* (1968), *The Villager's Son* (1977)), Charity Waciuma, whose writing has a Gikuyu setting (*Mweru the Ostrich Girl* (1966)), Susie Muthoni (*The Hippo who Couldn't Stop Crying* (1972)) and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (*Growing up at Lina School* (1971)). Making a move away from the social involvement of the *Kalasanda* texts, Kimenye also began writing children's texts in the mid-1960s and continued writing for juniors and adolescents until she moved to London in the late 1990s. Although Janet Nsibirwa Mdoe was writing children's adventure stories in Luganda, Kimenye confirms that she was influenced to write her *Moses* series and other junior readers because the stories written in English that were available to African minors had no relevance to them.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, writer of children's books, Elinor Sisulu who was born in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in 1958 says that 'the books she read as a child "were about the English

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 790.

<sup>35</sup> Nancy J. Schmidt, *Children's Books on Africa and their Authors: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York; London: Africana Publishing, 1975) and *Supplement to Children's Books on Africa and their Authors: An Annotated Bibliography* (London: Africana Publishing, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Grace Ogot, 'The African Writer', in *East African Journal*, 11 (November 1968), 35 – 37 (p. 37).

<sup>37</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye, 6 July 2006.



country-side. My head was filled with a vision of snow, goblins and pixies.’<sup>38</sup> The English author Enid Blyton, famed for stories such as *Tales from Fairyland* and *The Green Goblin*, in addition to her *Famous Five* adventure series, was and still is a popular children’s writer readily available to African children. Sisulu goes on to state:

If I came across Africa at all in the course of my reading, it was in the stories about missionaries, explorers and exotic jungles – nothing to do with my own reality. My own culture was never reflected in the printed word.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, in the following interview Kimenye recalls a workshop in Dar Es Salaam organised by Oxford University Press, to instruct African writers on the art of writing children’s books. She says:

Kimenye: [...] two people who were holding forth were a married couple, and they were writing the Oxford Series something or other – I know they got a deal of money for it. And they were putting their books out as examples of how to write for children, and we were appalled – all of us! All of us! And, there was almost a battle [...] I don’t think they lived in Africa so I couldn’t really say they were colonial.

Oldfield: So they were writing from a European viewpoint?

Kimenye: Yes. And he was obviously public school and everything, and she was the typical, sort of middle-class country-woman, and as somebody said, “Well, if we wrote this sort of thing people would think we were mad. We don’t have this standard of living.” Oh, you know, these boys go into the kitchen and cook – it says, “Quick, before your parents come I’ll take these tarts out of the oven!” [Laughs] An African child goes home and the mother says, “Quick, pick up a *mpombo* and fetch the water.”<sup>40</sup>

Since during this period English publishing houses were attempting to silence the indigenous voice and perspective by encouraging African writers to adopt a European style of writing for children, the difficulty facing the African writer was obviously one of perspective. Although writers such as Kimenye recognised the need for African centred works written in English, European publishers continued to encourage a colonial and/or Eurocentric style of writing, which, as far as fiction for African children was concerned, Schmidt confirms amounted to the transference of European stories into an African setting.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Elinor Sisulu in Charles R. Larson, *The Ordeal of the African Writer* (London: Zed Books, 2001), p. 78.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 78-9.

<sup>40</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.

<sup>41</sup> See Nancy J. Schmidt, ‘Resources on African Literature: Children’s Literature’, in *The Teaching of African Literature* ed. by Thomas Hale and Richard Priebe (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press & The African Literature Association, 1989), 125 – 147 (p. 132).



## The Figure of the Transgressive Child

Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido state that 'children's literature provides a way of bringing traditional [African] women's uses of words and the modern writer's role together',<sup>42</sup> as an affirmation of the notion that woman's/children's narratives are used to find a voice and identity for the woman writer while she simultaneously conforms to, and subverts normative femininity. Comparative analysis of the transgression of boundaries through the process of Signifyin(g), in Kimenye's and Macgoye's children's and young adults' writing, identifies the extent to which 'African' women's writing in this genre signifies to both African women and child readers. Further, this section demonstrates that Western readers, editors, and critics are unfamiliar with such African centred writing and consequently overlook the Signifyin(g) aspect of these texts, and its corresponding importance, because they do not fully understand how these texts Signify/signify.

Kimenye remains one of the most prolific 'African' writers of children's stories, yet African children's literature is an area that remains relatively unexplored. Aaron Mushengyezi explains:

Not much research has been done on Kimenye really. No, shamefully. I think it's partly because children's literature has not been an area that has been of interest to many academics at Makerere [...] it was not thought it was important to teach children's literature.<sup>43</sup>

This state of affairs is slowly beginning to change, however, with the planned introduction of a module focusing upon children's literature on the English degree at Makerere University. As a writer, Kimenye's *Moses* series has ensured that she is prominent in relation to the creation of the African genre of schoolboy adventure stories. Her popularity, however, is due to the success with which her writing signifies to her intended Ugandan/African audience. Owing to Kimenye's reluctance to confirm or deny biographical details as discussed in Chapter 2, the common assumption among African readers of her work is that she is an indigenous Luganda-speaking Ganda. However, herein lies a paradox because she is not an indigenous Muganda. Yet, her writing Signifies so effectively and naturally to her African readers that, just as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Fanon maintain that indigenous

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<sup>42</sup> Carole Boyce Davies & Elaine Savory Fido, 'African Women Writers: Toward a Literary History', *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literature*, ed. by Oyekan Owomoyela (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 311-346 (p. 341).

<sup>43</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Aaron Mushengyezi, Makerere University, 25 March 2008.



languages act as carriers of culture, so even Ugandan critics and academics like Abasi Kiyimba and Susan Kiguli assume that Kimenye is Ugandan and therefore a carrier of the Baganda culture. Kimenye's impact in Africa as an 'African' writer is such that Kiguli comments:

I think she has a very good base in oral tradition because some of these stories, I mean, they are more than just stories, they read like a folk tale would – you know, the characters.<sup>44</sup>

Though Kiguli's conjecture stems from the belief that Kimenye's command of the oral tradition is imbibed through indigenous upbringing, this is not the case. Asenath Bole Odaga explains the importance of the oral tradition to African societies:

Oral literature as in indigenous literature projected the societies image and gave a clear picture of the African world by treating events which were familiar to their members. The literature also corporated (sic) past events that were hidden in proverbs, riddles, tales, taboos and superstitions, legends and myths. A people's attitudes towards life which includes their philosophies; were also clearly portrayed in their oral literature. This formed a major part of a complex that was learnt through oral transmission, imitation and observation.<sup>45</sup>

Since she was not born and brought up in Africa, Kimenye was not privy to this type of experience as a child and therefore did not accumulate information such as that which is contained within the variety of African oral literature. Nevertheless, she confirms that as a child growing up in England her mother told her stories, thereby exposing her to the storytelling tradition. Later in life when she moved to Uganda, she integrated fully into Baganda society and culture, absorbing ideas contained within the various media that is representative of oral literature to the extent that as a mother herself, she undertook the traditional African role of mother as narrator and storyteller to her own sons. Hence, while involved with other mothers in telling stories about the Baganda gods, Kimenye was able to practise her skill in communicating indigenous cultural values, myths and ideology that has facilitated her successful projection of Baganda culture from the pages of her own creative writing. This is made apparent by, for example, casual references to things such as the *Ssabalangira's* tomb, and the Buganda system of governing that comprise the notions *Ggombolola* and *Ssaza* in the *Kalasanda* novels.<sup>46</sup> In addition, are the historical 1880s burning of the Baganda Martyrs at the pyre in *Moses and the Penpal* (1968);

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<sup>44</sup> Unpublished interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Susan Kiguli, Makerere University, 17 March 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Asenath Bole Odaga, *Literature for Children and Young People in Kenya* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> The title of *Ssabalangira* is given to the person appointed head of the royal clan – the position is not hereditary. *Ggombolola* and *Ssaza* denote sub-county and county respectively. See Chapter 2.



and reference to multiple Baganda household traditional eating utensils, and the female custom of kneeling to demonstrate respect as illustrated in *Kayo's House*.

A further aspect of Kimenye's ability to appeal and signify to her African audience resides in the inspiration she finds around her in everyday situations in Uganda and Kenya. By her own admission, her fiction is drawn from real life. Speaking about writing the first *Moses* book, Kimenye states:

I got that inspiration on my way back from half term at Kaptagat – you know, of the character. I didn't really think I was going to do a full series, but I thought it's got to be a school boy [...] I knew what the story would be, but I didn't know how to tell it. [...] And it hit me like a bolt. I don't know whether it was something the children had said, but I wrote on the back of a cigarette packet, "I've been thrown out of so many schools" – and I couldn't wait to get back and go on with it.<sup>47</sup>

In making a Ugandan boarding school the setting for the *Moses* series of stories, Kimenye Signifies upon the education system by incorporating and transforming the African boarding school tradition. Furthermore, she Signifies upon the figure of the child transgressor, or the child as 'Other'. It is this re-presenting and repetition of a child figure (the transgressor) and experiences familiar to her intended readers that strike a chord, leading Kiguli to state:

I went to boarding school when I was nine and some of the things she describes are exactly – they've been exaggerated, there's some hyperbole treatment, but, really, basically it's reality – the way boarding schools operated in high school and in a primary level. And you see Moses is a boy, yes, but I went to girls' schools and you could just put a character – a girl – and it would run exactly the same. It's most like sometimes we would read them and feel this Moses is a little more bold than we are but he's just like us – he's an abandoned kid trying to cope with authoritarianism, trying to cope with the way the adult world see the child [...].<sup>48</sup>

However, while Signifyin(g) on that which is familiar to her intended reader, Kimenye, through these children's texts, speaks to us about the society out of which the stories emerge and is hence involved in commenting upon the authoritarian way (East) African society operates with regard to children.

In England, there is a saying that children should be seen and not heard. This construct of childhood wherein children have no voice and therefore no valid opinion, where they are demure, polite, obedient and thus easy to handle, stems from a traditional nineteenth century notion of children. The associated belief, of course, is that it is our duty as adults, to mould these beings into what a human should be.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.

<sup>48</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Susan Kiguli.



Kiguli explains that the traditional Ugandan/African notion of children is that they have no valid contribution to make because they are just children. Kiguli states:

Here, when a child is brilliant, the child is patronized you know, because, “oh, coming from a child, that’s so impressive!” And I think for me that children have the most active of brains.<sup>49</sup>

This effort to tame and construct children, by European and African cultures alike, forms a part of the ideologies of both societies. Jacqueline Rose (1984) and Perry Nodelman (1992) argue that as adults we focus on how children are opposite to us and constantly attempt to construct them as limited and therefore ‘Other’ to adults, for adults are represented as the symbol of civilised behaviour.<sup>50</sup> However, Rose and Nodelman do not support the traditional ideological construction of children and hence, they recognise that the attempt to construct children to fit our particular ideology is further reinforced by children’s literature. Rose states:

[...] the adult’s intention [is] to get at the child with the child it portrays. If children’s fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp.<sup>51</sup>

Rose hereby proposes that children’s fiction is not about children at all. Rather it is concerned to fulfil an adult desire and consequently is more interested in providing narratives that represent images of children that conform to a model of childhood that defers to adult boundaries. Therefore, in representing images of children that conform to the ideological model, the (un)conscious desire is to provide a textual role model for children to imitate. Nodelman explains:

Children’s literature then represents a massive effort by adults to *colonize* children: to make them believe that they ought to be the way adults would like them to be, and to make them feel guilty about or downplay the significance of all the aspects of their selves that inevitably don’t fit the adult model.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, according to Nodelman, fiction of this sort attempts to persuade children to aspire and conform to the passive and malleable construct of childhood by showing them a view of childhood that the dominant ideology perceives to be normal. Hence, the child transgressor is perceived as deviant and ‘Other’ to the stereotyped and idealistic model of childhood promoted by the dominant ideology. In delineating the character of Moses, Kimenye both conforms to African normative femininity by

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984; repr. 1992) and Perry Nodelman, *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Longmans, 1992; 1996).

<sup>51</sup> Rose, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Nodelman, p. 82.



adopting the role of storyteller, and simultaneously crosses boundaries by subverting her normative role as an adult, a mother and a storyteller. This she does through her portrayal of the figure of the transgressive child, as opposed to that model of puerility that corresponds with the image that adults feel comfortable with and commend.

Though as an adult, Kimenye has no doubt been interpellated to expect children to conform to the specific model of obedience and passivity described above, as a writer, the notion of the child transgressor is attractive because children are naturally transgressive. Hence, she is not shy about introducing the reader to the figure of Moses the transgressor. There is no honeymoon period where Moses appears to conform to the construct of the docile and obedient child who is a part of the dominant ideology. Rather, the opening paragraph introduces the reader to Moses as follows:

I had just been expelled from my sixth school. They sent me back to Uncle Silasi's house, where I again met with the usual preaching mixed with abuse from him, and the usual floods of tears from his wife, Aunt Damali. Then I was banished to my bedroom while a family council hastily assembled to decide what next to do with me. It was pretty dull being there alone with only a silly old bee trying to bore his way through the window pane for company. But at least I was able to stretch out on a bed and have a peaceful smoke. I would not have minded a glass of beer, too, but there wasn't much hope of that in my uncle's house.<sup>53</sup>

In case of any doubt, the reaction of Uncle Silasi and Aunt Damali make it immediately apparent that Moses fails to conform to traditional expectations relating to the behaviour of children. Furthermore, that Kimenye confers upon him a sense of independence not generally encouraged in children is highlighted by Moses' transgressive autonomy that finds expression in his quite relaxed attitude to smoking and drinking alcohol. Offering reasons for his previous exclusions from school, Moses' narrative continues:

Maybe you won't believe this, but I was thrown out of St. Mary's Junior Secondary School simply because the History teacher, Miss Kalimuzo, said I was always prowling round her house at night when she was getting ready for bed. In fact it was just fate that made the gap in her back garden hedge the only safe exit from the school to the village bar. Then, at another place, there was a tremendous row because some of us invited a few girls from the convent school nearby to join us for a midnight party in the dormitory.<sup>54</sup>

Kimenye's expert use of imagery ensures that the scenes she depicts spring to life before her readers' eyes. Furthermore, her subtle humour ensures that Moses the transgressor actually becomes an endearing character, rather than the dislikeable one

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<sup>53</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *Moses* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968; repr. 2006), p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

that traditional perceptions of transgressive children interpellate both European and African readers alike to expect. Any shock value of Moses, a school boy, escaping school to while away his evenings in a local bar is negated by the vision of him creeping past the windows of his semi-clothed school mistress to attempt to push his way quietly through a hole in the hedge!

In reading Kimenye's *Moses* series of stories it is difficult to dismiss the notion that Kimenye is engaged in an attempt to empower African children through her stories. This is transgressive in itself, particularly considering that Kiguli maintains that the African approach to children is to silence and oppress their independence and individuality in much the same way that women are constructed and made to feel 'Other'.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, by writing African centred stories about and for African children, it is possible to detect that through her intertextuality, Kimenye crosses additional boundaries by simultaneously incorporating and transforming European literary antecedents like Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series and Richmal Crompton's *William* stories.

### Intertextuality in the *Moses* Stories

Kimenye was educated in England. She is familiar with both Enid Blyton and Richmal Crompton and even acknowledges that she enjoys the schoolboy humour of Crompton's *William* stories.<sup>56</sup> The *William* stories and the *Famous Five* series both feature child characters that exhibit aspects of transgressive behaviour thereby forming a link with the *Moses* stories. Crompton first created the character of William Brown in 1919, when he appeared in the story 'Rice Mould' in the February edition of *Home Magazine*. Yet in the *Moses* series it is possible to detect Kimenye's intertextual echoing of the *William* stories through her repetition and revision of the schoolboy motif. Hence, certain parallels can be drawn between Moses and Crompton's character, William Brown. William is arguably the most famous schoolboy in English literature and similarly, because of Kimenye's ability to capture the attention of her intended reading market, Moses has become possibly the most famous school boy in the African children's school/adventure genre. William is a scruffy eleven-year old perpetually on the look out for his next adventure, and in the

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<sup>55</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Susan Kiguli.

<sup>56</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.



same manner that Moses' Aunt and Uncle despair of him, William's parents have similarly lost all hope of William ever transforming into anything that remotely resembles the ideal child. The irreverent William's purpose in life is to flout the authority of his parents, teachers, or anyone else in a position of authority. In 'William's Birthday', William's pet dog, Jumble, is removed to the vet's surgery in order to prevent William from causing any further unintentional harm to the animal. William protests:

"Well, he'll prob'ly die now without me to look after him, an' it'll be your fault." His fury increased when his visits to the vet.'s establishment were forbidden. The vet. explained quite politely that William's presence there was having a deleterious effect upon his nerves and business.

"I din' do any harm," said William indignantly. "I cun't help upsettin' that jar of goldfishes an' I din' reely start those two dog fightin'. I bet they'd done it even if I'd not been there. An' I din' mean that white rat to get out of my pocket an' get 'em all excited. An' I din' bother him for food or anythin' when dinner-time came. I jus' ate dog biscuits an' ant eggs an' any stuff I found about."<sup>57</sup>

Crompton's humour is evident in this passage and her influence upon Kimenye's writing is apparent when compared with the excerpts from *Moses* earlier in this chapter. However, behind the humorous façade and William's boyish sense of adventure, it is noticeable that Crompton's writing contains a subversive element, as William is undoubtedly questioning authority, to the point where he even challenges his mother over a slice of cake:

"*Enough!*" he repeated. "I've had hardly any yet. I was only jus' beginning to have some when you looked at me. It's plain cake. It won't do me any harm. It's a plain cake. It won't do me any harm. I wu'nt eat it if it'd to me any harm. Sugar's *good* for you. Animals eat it to keep healthy. *Horses* eat it an' it don't do 'em any *harm*, an' poll parrots an' things eat it an' it don't do 'em any —" "Oh, don't argue, William," said his mother wearily. William's gift of eloquence was known and feared in his family circle.<sup>58</sup>

While William's contentiousness is not to be deemed a particularly serious transgression of boundaries, it is nevertheless, indicative of his determination to exercise, in his perception, his right to attain and maintain a sense of autonomy. In addition, the name of William's gang, 'the Outlaws', does, in the staid middle-class English society of the early 1900s, reinforce the notion of transgression through the connotations and associations that it has with law-breaking and the untamed, wild West.

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<sup>57</sup> Richmal Crompton, 'William's Birthday', in *The Just-William Collection* (London: Macmillan Children's Books, 1991), pp. 230 – 252 (pp. 230 – 231).

<sup>58</sup> Richmal Crompton, 'William and White Satin', in *The Just-William Collection*, pp. 21 – 36 (p. 21).

In comparison with Crompton, Kimenye also depicts childhood autonomy in her *Moses* stories, intertextually alluding to this motif by repeating and refiguring Crompton's representation. Hence, while Moses and his group of friends are perpetually involved in one schoolboy scrape or another like William and the Outlaws, their transgression goes further than the arguing that William involves himself in. Hence, the transgressions and challenges to adult authoritarianism of Moses and his friends King Kong, Itchy Fingers and Rukia appear in the form of Moses' and King Kong's failed attempt to 'run away to America where Moses intended to become a film star like Sidney Poitier'.<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere, these are evidenced by their regular break outs from school to bring waragi back from the village for Kigali, the gatekeeper; keeping a pet snake; illegal wine-making; rolling cigarettes from used tea-leaves; and gambling, to list but a few. Moreover, in Kimenye's texts, unlike the *William* stories, Moses is an orphan abandoned by his extended family to whatever school will take him. This is pertinent to many readers in Africa. Kimenye states:

The thing about *Moses* is that I've got a pile of fan letters tucked away in a file somewhere [...] from boys, and so many of them said, "Oh, Moses is just like me!" That is, orphans living with relatives.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, left at the mercy of Mukibi's Educational Institute for the Sons of African Gentlemen, Moses signifies to African readers as an abandoned fifteen-year-old boy trying to cope with the authoritarianism of the institution and the way children are seen by the adult world. Consequently, Moses and his friends have to learn how to survive in their environment since, as Kimenye affirms that, especially at boarding school, the children have nobody standing in the background to jump to their aid and defend them.<sup>61</sup>

One method that Moses and his friends fall back on as a way of gaining control and assuming a level of independence is to try to make money. The African preoccupation with making money is a trope that appears with regularity in the *Moses* books. In *Moses and the Penpal* (1968), Kimenye Signifies upon the notion of making money by linking it to the seemingly innocent activity of writing to a pen-friend. Coming across a *Sunday Nation* newspaper detailing nine individuals in a

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<sup>59</sup> Kimenye, *Moses*, p.22.

<sup>60</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Barbara Kimenye.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



‘Penpals Wanted’ advertisement, Moses’ best friend, King Kong spots a business opportunity:

It was during Mr Lutu’s lesson that King Kong passed round his announcement of penpals for sale. The actual wording was “Enibody want a penpal si K.K.”, and it acted like magic. Everybody was suddenly alert and there was a hum of excitement which eventually caused Mr Lutu to turn round from the blackboard where he was busily scribbling meaningless diagrams, and demand attention. No sooner was his back again turned, though, than there was another bout of seething activity. Scraps of paper were passed back and forth, King Kong was questioned in furtive whispers, and I wasn’t surprised when Mr Lutu finally lost his temper and threatened us all with a visit to the Deputy Head’s office.<sup>62</sup>

Moses soon realises that King Kong has hit upon a novel way of generating money. Due to the popularity of the idea and the shortage of names, King Kong’s initial asking price for the details of a pen pal increases rapidly to fifty cents from the original asking price of thirty. Moses loses no time in going into partnership with his friend by suggesting that business overheads could be reduced if, rather than buy them, they were to get their old copies of *Sunday Nation* from Mr Karanja, the deputy headmaster, when he has finished reading them. However, Moses is not the only child to demonstrate his business acumen, as those who bought penpals from King Kong are astute enough to sell shares in theirs to those still waiting for pen-friend details. All of this makes for an interesting and humorous read, yet, to what extent is Kimenye involved in assessing and critiquing African society by narrating this tale? In addition, is there a hidden polemic within her writing? In Signifyin(g) upon the whole idea of having a penpal, Kimenye is simultaneously involved in focusing attention on the transgression of a few unprincipled and exploitative school children who want to try and make a few coins. However, this seemingly innocent and unscrupulous behaviour can be interpreted as a form of low-level corruption representative of, and covertly commenting upon far higher government levels of corruption that occur frequently throughout Africa.

A further strand to the notion of the transgressive child is to be found in the power struggle that occurs between the headmaster, Mr Mukibi, and the children at Mukibi’s Educational Institute for the Sons of African Gentlemen. In *Moses in Trouble* (1968), Kimenye addresses the issue of the power struggle between adults and children through a story that revolves around a protest about the standard of the school food. In an endeavour to put an end to the bad food that the school provides, the children try to bring Mr Mukibi and the standard of food he feeds his pupils to the

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<sup>62</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *Moses and the Penpal* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 3.



attention of the Minister of Education by posting him a package of dead insects. However, Mr Mukibi's reaction is not to change the diet he offers his students, but is rather in the form of punishment. He tells the school:

As from tomorrow, each dormitory in order of dormitory numbers will do one week's kitchen duty. Kitchen duty will include the preparation and serving of every meal, from breakfast to supper, as well as the washing up and cleaning of kitchen utensils. Should there be any complaints concerning dirt or insects in the food, I shall hold the students currently on kitchen duty wholly responsible and deal with them accordingly.<sup>63</sup>

Fearing retribution from the authorities, Mr Mukibi's punishment involves oppressing and silencing the child voice. Yet, more than this, in forcing the students to take care of all kitchen related duties, Kimenye highlights that corruption in Africa filters down from the top to the bottom. Mukibi's readiness to engage in corruption becomes apparent when Kigali reveals to Moses and King Kong that the school cooks have refused to work and are on strike. Hence, in choosing to penalize his students a dormitory at a time through kitchen duty, Mukibi simultaneously solves his staffing problem and smothers the challenging voice of the child transgressors, but his students mirror his corruption and transgression. Consequently, when it is the turn of Dorm 2 to feed the school they take care of their own interests first by 'hoard[ing] the best of the food' for themselves and dishing up small portions and no second helpings.<sup>64</sup>

In Blyton's *Famous Five* adventures, the transgressive character is represented by Georgina. Georgina is a girl who wants to be a boy so badly that she insists on being called 'George' by everyone rather than by her given name. In *Five Go Off in a Caravan* (1946), while enjoying a picnic in the sun Anne comments to George:

"You've got more freckles these hols, George, than you ever had in your life before."

"That doesn't worry *me*!" said George, who never cared in the least how she looked, and was even angry with her hair for being too curly, and making her look too much like a girl.<sup>65</sup>

George has no inclination towards the feminine in the slightest: she is a tomboy who has her hair cut like a boy and dresses as much like a boy as possible. Furthermore, she subverts the European Victorian notion of how a child should behave by being ill-tempered, arguing with her parents, sneaking off when she has been told not to and sulking. However, in all of the *Famous Five* adventures Blyton bestows power upon

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *Moses in Trouble* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>65</sup> Enid Blyton, *Five Go Off in a Caravan* (Kent: W.H. Smith & Son, 1986), p. 24.



Julian, Dick, George and Anne. Hence, she creates child characters with a sense of autonomy and independence that is developed to the extent that they have the freedom to go off and have liberating adventures that involve solving crimes, mysteries, and catching burglars. Similarly, Kimenye can be perceived as making intertextual links with Blyton's propensity to invest power in children by her attempts to empower children through the *Moses* stories. Thus, Moses and his friends are often to be found involved in rather grown up adventures and escapades such as catching spies in *Moses in a Muddle* (1976) and apprehending the burglar that breaks into Mr Mukibi's house in *Moses*. By empowering her characters in this manner, Kimenye comments upon the fact that human flourishing requires freedom and autonomy. Institutions such as the boarding school system that Kimenye represents in the *Moses* books attempt to inhibit and squash autonomy. In this respect, Kimenye's representation of Mukibi's school can be interpreted as a comment upon colonialism. Isidore Okpewho states:

Today we have educational institutions at various levels where young men and women are taught lessons on life and conduct as well as skills which will help them to earn a living. In traditional African society, there were no such schools organized for general instruction.<sup>66</sup>

Prior to colonialism, authoritarian institutions for educating African children did not exist. Asenath Bole Odaga explains that 'the informal indigenous education was meant to equip youth for the sort of life they would lead.'<sup>67</sup> Children were therefore educated informally in the villages by individuals who passed on specific skills; cultural rules, ideals, morals, origins and so forth were transmitted through traditional orature comprising myths, legends, songs, narratives, proverbs, riddles and folktales. Consequently, pre-colonialism, African children were allowed a certain amount of freedom. By investing power in her child characters, Kimenye attempts to give back the freedom that is suppressed by the authoritarian education system.

### **Evaluating the Success of Intertextuality in Macgoye's Children's Narratives**

During the colonial period, Eurocentric modes of thinking silenced, oppressed and marginalized traditional African culture and society. The advent of independence for many African countries began to change this however, with the attempt to

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<sup>66</sup> Isidore Okpewho, *African Oral Literature* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 115.

<sup>67</sup> Odaga, p. 23.

combine a consideration and appreciation of African traditions, previously marginalized by colonialism, with an understanding of the importance of progress. Thus, Khorana states that 'novels of progress are school stories, which are intended to inspire children to participate in the task of nation building.'<sup>68</sup> The inference contained within this statement is that the school story genre is significant in its concern to emphasise and interpellate children that for African countries to recover from the negative effects and legacy of colonialism, all members of society must come together with a common aim. Macgoye's *Growing up at Lina School* (1971) is a story about a girls' boarding school in Kenya and is defined by Khorana as an example of the novel of progress. Describing Macgoye's text, Khorana states that it:

capture[s] the atmosphere of the British boarding school, with the protagonists getting in trouble with the teachers and prefects for playing pranks and breaking rules. Importance is placed on sports competitions and athletics to build team spirit and to develop moral character.<sup>69</sup>

Although Macgoye's text demonstrates a preoccupation with establishing a team spirit and developing moral character, Khorana's description is not otherwise relevant or appropriate for this narrative. Macgoye does not cross any boundaries in respect of her depiction of the school since the atmosphere she represents is not particularly one of the British boarding school, and in general the behaviour of the girls does not appear to be transgressive (other than consuming the remainder of their party food under the blankets with the aid of an electric torch after lights out). Furthermore, there are no examples of sports or athletics competitions within the text. Yet that is not to say that she fails to promote a positive attitude towards team building and an honest and ethical attitude. More appropriately, in creating an African novel about a girls' boarding school Macgoye can be perceived as incorporating and transforming the schoolboy stories of Kimenye, thereby relating intertextually to the popular *Moses* adventure stories.

As in the *Moses* series, there is a sense of adventure and excitement when, like Moses and King Kong, Rebecca and Purity foil an attempted robbery of the school office. Furthermore, Macgoye depicts in Rebecca a character that, like Moses, aspires to be a film star. Nevertheless, Macgoye's narrative can also be interpreted as an intertextual revision of the *Moses* stories and this enables her to simultaneously conform to, and subvert normative femininity. Conforming to her role as 'African'

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<sup>68</sup> Khorana, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



woman the narrator and teacher, Macgoye is involved in interpellating her intended young Kenyan readers into: understanding the importance of maintaining contact with their roots by retaining indigenous languages and keeping alive African customs and traditions; an appreciation of the notion of what is normative femininity; and the importance of developing the spirit of co-operation.

Macgoye addresses the spirit of co-operation that is so crucial in the construction of postcolonial independent countries by highlighting the spirit of co-operation that exists among the girls and teachers at Lina High School. Thus, through her intertextual interaction with Mr Mukibi from Kimenye's *Moses* series and her apparent transformation of him into the Headmistress, Macgoye does not delineate a leader characterised by her corrupt nature, but instead one that is honourable and fair in her dealings with the staff and pupils. The effect of leading by example is to be found in the behaviour of the students, who unite to raise money through the making and sale of cakes at the school fair in order that they can donate money to the scholarship fund and so pay the fees of a student encountering hardship.<sup>70</sup> This exemplifies not only the co-operation but also further highlights the preparatory guidance of the headmistress in anticipation of the pro-active roles of these young women in their respective communities within a young postcolonial independent country. This can be interpreted as Macgoye using a pro-active teaching role to demonstrate the needs of a positively functioning society without which the corruption highlighted in Kimenye's work can grow like a cancer within all levels of that society.

In comparison with Moses in Kimenye's stories, the female protagonist, Grace, in *Growing up at Lina School* shows a tendency towards transgressing boundaries. Returning from Europe at the age of fourteen after a period of six years away from Kenya, Grace occupies the new Third Space discussed at length in Chapter 2. As a result of living overseas Grace understands the importance of a scholarly education, is familiar with the notion of progress as well as European customs and ways of life, but she is also aware of the value of maintaining contact with her heritage. By contrast, when the elder visits the school it is apparent that he is sceptical about progress and the relatively recent introduction of formal education:

"You can learn many things and yet be short of wisdom," pronounced the elder.

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<sup>70</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Growing up at Lina School* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1988), pp. 43 – 46.

The girls acknowledged that this was so.

“Learning is a new introduction, like a chair to sit on, but wisdom is a staff to walk on, and a staff brings with it respect.”<sup>71</sup>

The idea that formal schooling furnishes individuals with scholarly knowledge whilst being unable to provide an environment for pupils to absorb wisdom indicates that the elder does not think that change represents progress, that he mourns the changes in learning, and the marginalization of traditional customs and approaches brought about by the colonial system of learning. By contrast, however, Macgoye transgresses boundaries of normative femininity to create in the character of Grace, a female with a voice and a positive sense on an African self. Thus, Grace demonstrates that in contemporary Kenyan society it is possible for individuals, females included, to combine progress with a respect and understanding of tradition by having a sense of community and honouring traditional learning, beliefs and customs. Signifyin(g) upon traditional African values while still demonstrating that they have a place in modern Kenyan society, Macgoye represents in Grace a character that is able to recite to the elder ‘the six generations of her father’s family, going back to Okech’.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, Macgoye transgresses boundaries relating to the normative position of African women because Grace’s awareness and understanding of traditional knowledge gives her the confidence and autonomy to deliberate with the elder in a manner that would only be expected between equals:

“What sort of school is this,” cried the old man, “where people can be so ignorant?”

“My grandfather,” asked Grace bravely, “can you recommend me a school where I can go to learn to eat?”

“What do you say, girl. Do you not know how to eat? Do you live on air overseas there?”

“No, sir,” said Grace. “I know how to eat *ugali* and many other things. But suppose I did not know – no teacher in this school has ever bothered to ask me whether I have had instruction in eating. And it is so with other things, my grandfather, which we learn at our mother’s knee. If the home does not reach us early, the school will not do so when we are full-grown.”

“My girl,” said the old man “you have the tongue of the lizard, swift to strike and impossible to catch. Gladly would I lend my grandsons cattle to offer for you if they were not such fools. But perhaps you girls of these days despise cattle.”

“We cannot despise that which brings us a home,” said Grace. “But wisdom is prized even above cattle, is it not? If a young man needs his grandfather to speak for him, how will he ask for *uji* when the house is his? Do not offer me a fool, my lord”.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp.15-16.



Grace's responses to the elder's comments are all the more transgressive because not only is she a woman, who traditionally does not have a voice as discussed in Chapter 4, but she is also still a child. In Signifyin(g) upon the notion of traditional learning Macgoye provides readers with a positive female role model who demands to be treated equally. However, Macgoye tempers this representation of female empowerment by interpellating female readers into aspects of normative femininity such as marriage, and having to make the best of one's lot if it cannot be changed.<sup>74</sup>

### Macgoye and *The Secret Seven*

A persistent legacy of colonialism throughout Africa is the continued use of English as the preferred language of the formal school system; teaching, textbooks and readers are all in English.<sup>75</sup> By contrast, indigenous African languages are the means of communication within the majority of homes. In connection with this occurrence, J.S. Smith states that, 'A student brings to his reading a moral and religious code and social philosophy assimilated primarily from his family and community's background.'<sup>76</sup> Smith's assertion addresses the reality that indigenous language-speaking African students bring to their reading of texts written in English traditional African values and influences. The effect of this can be interpreted in two ways. As has already been highlighted earlier in this chapter, an English text written from an English perspective fails to signify effectively to African readers because, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o points out, indigenous African languages act as important carriers of cultural heritage and values. Consequently, such books are irrelevant to this category of reader since the values and images they draw from in order to interpret the text are African. Alternatively, and just as significantly, Smith can also be interpreted as anticipating Gloria Anzaldúa's use of code-switching, where, by applying a linguistic concept to a postcolonial concept, she suggests that the indigenous language-speaking

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 48. Matron wants to go home because the work at Lina School makes her back ache and her mother is old and sick. Because of her responsibilities to the school, in addition to those she has as a mother to feed and provide for her children since the death of her husband, she is unable to visit home until the middle of the holidays.

<sup>75</sup> Likewise, it should be noted that French and Portuguese are also still used in some areas of Africa.

<sup>76</sup> J.S. Smith, *A Critical Approach to Children's Literature* (New York: Macgraw Hill Book Co., 1967), p. 120, cited in Asenath Bole Odaga, *Literature for Children and Young People in Kenya* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1985), p. xiv.



reader must attempt to switch codes of understanding in order for interpretation to occur.<sup>77</sup>

Smith's statement is pertinent to the concept of intertextuality because it can likewise be proposed that, as does the reader, the writer also brings to his/her writing a perspective and influences that are principally absorbed from their native family and social heritage. Thus, is it not possible that Smith's thought can be applied to the writing of Macgoye since as an English-born and educated writer she brings to her writing of African-oriented fiction, influences derived from English-oriented children's narratives?

In Chapter 2 I addressed the question of Macgoye and Kimenye living in-between cultures and their subsequent occupation of a new space which allows for their Borderland consciousness, defined as a 'new *mestiza* consciousness' by Anzaldúa.<sup>78</sup> New states of consciousness understandably comprise new strategies of writing and hence Anzaldúa coins the term 'mestiza rhetoric' to describe new styles of writing comprising the mixing of genres, and the switching between codes.<sup>79</sup> In Macgoye's *The Black Hand Gang* (1997) it is noticeable that in drawing intertextually upon Blyton's *The Secret Seven* stories she code switches between English and African influences.

Utilising the African woman's normative activity of narrating children's stories, Macgoye is able to subvert normative femininity to covertly voice a hidden polemic, which draws attention to a socio-political climate, which, through fear, immorality and corruption continues to thwart any effort that may be made for Kenya to become a fully functioning independent nation. Opening a dialogue with traditional stories customarily told to children by African women, Macgoye uses storytelling to transgress boundaries and enable her own transcendence of the traditional female role by manipulating these narratives to create new stories that embrace contemporary issues. Thus, issues like looting, raiding, and ineffective policing, which Macgoye highlights in *The Black Hand Gang* can be interpreted as a metaphor for the wider problems Kenya experiences at the hands of corrupt leaders

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<sup>77</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, 'Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality', in *Crossing Borderlands: Composition and Postcolonial Studies* ed. by Andrea A. Lunsford and Lahoucine Ouzgane (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), pp. 33 – 66.

<sup>78</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), Preface, p. 20 and p. 77.

<sup>79</sup> Anzaldúa, 'Toward a Mestiza Rhetoric: Gloria Anzaldúa on Composition and Postcoloniality', p. 34.



and government officials, which ultimately prevents Kenya from becoming a successful country. Purporting to write from an African perspective, Macgoye brings English influences to her writing of African children's fiction through her intertextual allusions to the *Secret Seven* novels, thereby incorporating and transforming this European literary antecedent.

The first of the *Secret Seven* novels was published in 1949. *Secret Seven* is the name of a children's club numbering seven children and their spaniel, Scamper. The members comprise Peter, the leader, his sister Janet, and their friends Barbara, Pam, Jack, Colin and George. They hold regular meetings in Peter and Janet's garden shed, have a secret password to gain entry, in addition to a badge to denote membership of their society. Their aim is to solve mysteries that baffle the police, which they do by searching for clues, spying, and shadowing suspects. As head of the club, Peter ensures that the other members stick to the rules and allocates duties. Macgoye's the Black Hand Gang is so called because it denotes a black Kenyan/African children's secret society with five members: Onyango is the leader and Hassan is the youngest member who was found abandoned crawling in the streets and taken in by the woman he calls Auntie Adija. In addition, there is Onyango's friend, Waithaka; and his sister, Jane; and Peter, who wears a calliper on one leg. While intertextually interacting with the *Secret Seven* stories, Macgoye is also engaged in a dialogue with the youth sub-culture of gangs and the current socio-political climate in Kenya. Like the *Secret Seven*, the gang have a meeting place (Peter's granny's store room) and a secret signal, but instead of a badge, in order to signify to the Kenyan youth, Macgoye Signifies upon the colours of the Kenya flag and the struggle for independence that it denotes. Consequently, the gang wear 'red, green and white armbands.'<sup>80</sup> These carry with them the connotations of the colours of the flag that are symbolic of the spilt blood of the Kenyan peoples, Kenya's natural wealth, and the country's hope for peace. Additionally, the colours can be interpreted as Signifyin(g) upon positive qualities associated with childhood as red is representative of excitement and energy, green symbolises renewal and rebirth, while white is suggestive of youth and purity. Hence, whilst the struggle for an independent Kenya has produced the type of corruption and abuse of power highlighted by Kimenye in the *Moses* stories, in addition to the continued exclusion of women and

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<sup>80</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *The Black Hand Gang* (Nairobi; Kampala: East African Educational, 1997), p. 1.



minority groups, Macgoye's hidden polemic, as re-presented through the Black Hand Gang, constitutes a vision of the potential re-birth of an honourable and inclusive independent Kenyan society.

Accordingly, and in line with the notion of a more principled and un-corrupt society, the members of the Black Hand Gang, like the Secret Seven, are interested in performing good deeds and trying to unravel crimes that confound the police. Thus the narrator informs the reader:

He [Onyango] was thinking of cases that baffled the police and might be solved by the gang. There seemed to be plenty. Who broke the loudspeaker at the political meeting? Who drained the petrol out of the secondary school bus? Who stole the typewriters from the community centre? Who raided Mrs. Kamau's flat? But the police were not only baffled. They seemed to have lost heart. You did not see rewards being offered for the answer to any of these questions. Even when a teacher reported that a typewriter like the stolen one was on sale at a certain second-hand shop, no one wanted to take the risk of checking where it had come from. A climate of fear was not good for finding adventures.<sup>81</sup>

The thought processes that Onyango goes through while attempting to produce a programme of events for the Black Hand Gang, nevertheless, enables Macgoye to comment upon the state of contemporary Kenyan society. Transforming the unspoken and underlying notion of class privilege that exists within Blyton's *Secret Seven* texts Macgoye re-presents a society that, through misappropriation of power and funds, is driven by poverty and the human instinct to survive.

Continuing the theme of a more principled and ethical Kenya, Macgoye addresses the notion of an inclusive Kenyan society through her depiction of the Black Hand Gang. As with the Secret Seven, the Black Hand Gang includes both genders. Unlike the Secret Seven, however, Macgoye includes Peter, a disabled gang member. Onyango has concerns initially because he believes that:

[...] spies would easily remember what he looked like. Onyango was sure a footprint expert would track him easily because he had to swing the bad leg out and then come down heavily on the raised boot. In detective stories, you chose people who were easy to disguise for your secret society.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, Macgoye crosses boundaries related to the issue of the acceptance of disabled individuals into society. Accordingly, rather than being ignored, discriminated against and marginalized, Peter is accepted into the gang as a fully functioning member. The implication is that in a contemporary society, disabled people form a part of that society and should be treated fairly and with respect. Thus,

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp.2-3.



Onyango emphasises, “Our doors are not closed to anybody from the neighbourhood who is interested in adventure and doing good”.<sup>83</sup> Onyango stresses further that the neighbourhood comprises “some Patel children in our school. And you remember the Goans in that block of flats. And the Sisters”, thereby indicating that the gang does not exclude members on the grounds of race, creed, or colour either.<sup>84</sup>

Writing children’s fiction for a society that continues to remain male dominated, Macgoeye crosses gender related boundaries to include Jane in the Black Hand Gang. The narrator highlights that Onyango, who ‘generally took the lead’,<sup>85</sup> assumes a patriarchal perspective:

Onyango sighed again. He had not reckoned on having girls in the gang at all. But Jane was the elder sister of his friend Waithaka, and there was no way of keeping her out. Waithaka, who though only eleven was right at the top of Standard Five, said that was the way the world was going. You couldn’t keep girls out of anything any more.<sup>86</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 4, Macgoeye continues to reject any charges of being a feminist herself, yet here she engages with and acknowledges the positive effects of feminism and highlights that more frequently African women refuse to be marginalized. Thus, not only is Jane allowed to be a member of the gang, but Macgoeye represents her as a self-assured female. Likewise, when the gang recover VJ’s granny’s gold bangles, she informs the gang of how in her youth she was actively involved in partition by ‘run [ning] messages during the campaign for independence’.<sup>87</sup> Macgoeye uses female characters that fail to conform to the notion of the traditional African female, as defined by the perception of normative femininity, because they exhibit agency, voice, and a sense of self. As Roberta Seelinger Trites states:

the feminist protagonist remains active and celebrates her agency and her voice. This, then, is feminism’s greatest impact on children’s literature: it has enabled the awakening of the female protagonist to the positive power she holds.<sup>88</sup>

However, in conversation Macgoeye challenges the notion of the submissive African female. This contradicts Trites’s Eurocentric feminist viewpoint that children’s literature has been significantly affected by feminism.<sup>89</sup> Hence when Onyango

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp.1-2.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.45.

<sup>88</sup> Roberta Seelinger Trites, *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children’s Novels* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. ix.

struggles to think of a problem for the gang to solve Jane takes the lead. She decides that Sungura should be the focus of their attentions:

“There is a boy who dropped out of my class after his father died,” said Jane. “He was not particularly clever, but we thought it was a pity. There is a time he was roasting maize by the roadside, but now I see him swaggering about the clothes market dressed very smartly. He seems to have a lot of money but he doesn’t seem to do any work. If some relation is looking after him, he ought to get back to school. Would you guys help to find out?”<sup>90</sup>

Jane continues to drive the solving of the mystery by discouraging the involvement of the police in order that the gang can retain more control of the outcome, and by taking an active role in the questioning of Sungura. But under cover of the Black Hand Gang’s involvement in the solving of the mystery of Sungura, Macgoye’s narrative takes on the form of a social commentary to illustrate the importance of an education. Signifyin(g) upon a trope that is recognisable to African children because it is a common occurrence, Macgoye illustrates the ease with which orphaned children fall in to criminal activity because it becomes, literally, a life saving prospect. However, unlike in life, she is able to manipulate and transform the outcome for Sungura so that he can resume his education, presumably as a precursor to finding legal employment.

Unlike Kimenye’s *Moses* stories and Blyton’s *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* adventures, in *The Black Hand Gang* Macgoye seems unable to sustain an adventure throughout the duration of the whole text and instead writes a series of short adventures. The effect of this is disappointing: the adventures do not have the element of excitement and anticipation that grabs the attention of readers in the way that Kimenye and Blyton’s narratives do. Furthermore, a series of short adventures do not allow for a mounting of tension. In *Further Adventures of the Black Hand Gang* (2005) Macgoye again writes a series of short stories. This text is even more disappointing than *The Black Hand Gang*, which can be attributed to a change in the tone. *Further Adventures of the Black Hand Gang* no longer has a sense of intertextual allusion to the *Secret Seven* and as a result there is no feeling of any sense of adventure because the children are not actually involved in any exciting escapades. Rather, each chapter is concerned with things like making envelopes for a teacher’s wedding invitations, debating the pros and cons of the viability of messenger pigeons as a money-making venture, discussing Onyango’s family situation, and solving a crossword puzzle to get a free sausage. The only chapters of any merit are the ones

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<sup>90</sup> Macgoye, *The Black Hand Gang*, pp.4-5.



where, as in *The Black Hand Gang*, Macgoye seems to be making a social comment. Thus, when Peter inadvertently helps a gang of criminals who are ‘cheating people over exam papers’ in ‘Exam Time Adventure’, the narrative can be read as both a warning about corruption, and a statement regarding the state and quality of Kenya’s education system when parents feel that they have to pay for exam papers in order to be able to coach their children to ensure a pass.<sup>91</sup> Regrettably, for the child reader, the Black Hand Gang are not actually involved in trying to solve the puzzle of the exam paper scam and therefore there is not actually an adventure to speak of or even hold the interest of child readers. Similarly, the story, ‘The Children’s Palace’ discusses one approach to social reform through a seemingly utopian vision of turning a building in the process of being built into a children’s palace along the lines of a Dr Barnardos establishment.

Whilst not wishing to belittle the significance of Macgoye’s social commentary, once she moves away from apparently forming an intertextual relationship with European literary antecedents, her children’s narratives seem less successful. Nevertheless, Macgoye is a well-known and respected Kenyan author, which guarantees publication of her texts and a ready market of buyers/readers. Furthermore, her children’s narratives are published, like Kimenye’s, as Junior Readers, a fact that ensures the promotion of the texts as an aid to encouraging and improving the reading ability of school children. When Kimenye is asked about the change in writing style from the *Kalasanda* books to school readers and children’s fiction, she is careful to point out that she took care to ensure that they were relevant to, and resonated with her African readers. Macgoye certainly chooses topics that resonate as African, but in comparison with Kimenye’s, her children’s narratives seem dull and hard work.

### **Breaking Taboos**

Continuing to choose topics that resonate with her African audience, Kimenye’s *Prettyboy, Beware* (1997) and *Beauty Queen* (1997), exemplify a further change of style representative of a bold transgression of cultural boundaries and her ability to change her subject matter depending on developments in contemporary

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<sup>91</sup> Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, *Further Adventures of the Black Hand Gang* (Nairobi; Kampala; Dar es Salaam: East African Educational, 2005), p. 10.

society.<sup>92</sup> Although like Macgoye's *The Black Hand Gang*, which highlights the relative ease with which orphaned and street children can fall into a life of crime in order to stay alive, Kimenye's *Prettyboy, Beware* also Signifies upon the image of African street children, it does so in a far more polemical manner. Likewise, *Beauty Queen* Signifies upon the glamour associated with the Western notion of a beauty queen by refiguring and repeating the image, transporting it to an African space, and in so doing stripping away the attraction to lay bare some of the harsher realities of life. Furthermore, both texts have strong connections with Kimenye's *Moses* series and Macgoye's *The Black Hand Gang* books as they link back to the corruption and exploitation for financial gain apparent in all levels of African socio-politics and economics.

*Prettyboy, Beware* relates the tale of Matthew: when misfortune visits his parents, they send him to family friends on the coast in order for him to finish his education and to experience a better life than the one they can offer. Once there, however, due to a series of unfortunate events Matthew becomes dependent upon, and is abused by a Gay European man. He descends into the life of a rent boy, selling his body to Gay European tourists to live. Ultimately, he is infected with HIV, which progresses to Aids, culminating in death. In *Beauty Queen*, Kimenye raises the issues of incest and Aids. The story centres upon a teenager persuaded to enter a beauty contest as a favour to the organiser. Joe Banda, a 'flesh merchant', spots fourteen-year-old Adela's unspoilt beauty and innocence.<sup>93</sup> With the aid of Adela's sister, Ujeni, Joe Banda takes control of Adela's life, grooming her to become a world-class beauty queen. However, her journey to fame and fortune is cut tragically short by the HIV Aids virus.

In Signifyin(g) upon the figure of the beauty queen and the street child, Kimenye's refiguring of commonly accepted impressions of these individuals becomes an opportunity to focus upon Aids, Gay homosexuality and incest. She is careful to take steps in both texts to avoid stigmatizing specific African areas or countries by using fictional place names in *Beauty Queen*, and being non-specific about the coastal area in *Prettyboy, Beware*. However, her concentration upon such controversial topics ensures her transgression of taboo African centred boundaries of

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<sup>92</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *Prettyboy, Beware* (Nairobi: East African Educational, 1997), and *Beauty Queen* (Nairobi: East African Educational, 1997).

<sup>93</sup> Barbara Kimenye, *Beauty Queen* (Nairobi: East African Educational, 1997), p.79.



both text and reader. Confirming Kimenye's transgression of textual boundaries, Kiyimba comments that in writing with an African audience in mind, 'the subjects she deals with are the kind of subject we wish to pretend doesn't exist in Africa because it is regarded as a European thing'.<sup>94</sup> Implicit in Kiyimba's statement is that boundaries of text are challenged and crossed due to Kimenye's chosen subject matter, as her implied audience prefers to ignore issues such as incest, homosexuality and HIV Aids. Nevertheless, Kiyimba admits that 'the lessons in these works are quite heavy; and like Kimenye's other writings, these books cannot be dismissed off-hand simply because their primary audience is children'.<sup>95</sup> His comment clearly alludes to the significance of the content therein and those issues Kimenye endeavours to bring to the forefront for discussion. In fact, her inclusion of an 'Introduction' in both texts is clearly an attempt to pre-empt the negative response and to justify the raising of taboo subject matters within the narratives as a means of prompting debate and furthering enlightenment of these topics. In *Beauty Queen* Kimenye states:

The message of this book [...] is [...] addressed specifically to girls who have reached the age of finding themselves very interested in, and of growing interest to members of the opposite sex.

On the whole it is a sad message intended to add to the general awareness that this rampaging killer disease is no respecter of persons and is capable of spreading like wildfire in ways other than through sexual intercourse.  
<sup>96</sup>

Drawing on new concepts from contemporary African life, this introduction makes apparent that Kimenye has progressed to using her children's narratives to highlight important social issues like the transmission of Aids. She is therefore concerned to assure readers that her preoccupation in *Beauty Queen* is with consciousness raising, in particular the consciousness raising of adolescent girls regarding certain myths and realities associated with HIV and Aids. Similarly, in *Prettyboy, Beware* she writes:

This book is a straightforward warning to boys to [sic] how easy it is for them to be drawn into a form of degradation if ever they find themselves in a strange place, alone and penniless. It deals with a subject which while increasingly apparent in developing societies: especially in those countries heavily dependent upon tourism for the better part of their revenue, fails to arouse concern in government circles, not even when sensationally featured in some local newspaper or other.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Abasi Kiyimba.

<sup>95</sup> Abasi Kiyimba, 'Cultural Dialogue and the Language of the Neighbour's Child: Lessons from Barbara Kimenye's Writing', in *No Child is an Island: The Case for Children's Literature in Translation* ed. by Pat Pinsent (Lichfield: Pied Piper Publishing, 2006), pp. 239 – 252 (p. 244).

<sup>96</sup> Kimenye, *Beauty Queen*, 'Introduction'.

<sup>97</sup> Kimenye, *Prettyboy, Beware*, 'Introduction'.



The degradation referred to by Kimenye is that of Gay homosexuality. Homosexuality is viewed as un-African by the dominant ideology, with the widespread myth being that there is no homosexuality in Africa.<sup>98</sup> Consequently, it is an act that is illegal in Uganda and many other African countries. Nevertheless, denial does not raise awareness of how this activity can affect young boys, and in particular, young boys forced to live on the streets.

Ostensibly, the common thread linking *Prettyboy*, *Beware* and *Beauty Queen* is a storyline that draws on the impact and effects of the HIV Aids virus. However, in crossing cultural boundaries to raise the issue of this disease, Kimenye introduces a further theme that is common to both texts: the corruption of youth. In *Beauty Queen*, the corruption of Adela occurs initially when she is in the care of her father. Returning home after winning the 'Miss Kabongo District' beauty contest, Adela is seen in a new light by her father.<sup>99</sup> Hence, when she is sleeping in bed:

She was wandering in an unintelligible dream when a sweating, heavily-breathing body stole into her bed, and clumsy hands fumbled impatiently with the fold of *kanga* in which Adela was wrapped. Only as she sensed a rough urgency in the handling did she become wide awake, and then, as the horror of the situation dawned upon her, she let out a terrified scream.

Instantly, the big, clumsy body withdrew. Lights were switched on in other parts of the house, then Adela's mother and the maid Lucretia swiftly padded into her room, their faces reflecting a strangely furtive fear.

"She has had a nightmare," her mother hissed at Lucretia, noting the disordered sheets. "You go back to bed. I'll attend to her."

Lucretia hesitated for a moment, threw her mistress a glance of utter contempt, then turned and left the room. Adela feverishly clutched her mother's hand. "Father! It was father!" she whispered huskily. "I smelled his sweat and he tried to. . ."

"Hush, child!" her mother quietly admonished. "You were dreaming. Your father is a good man. He would never harm you."

"It was father," Adela tearfully insisted but her mother shook her head.

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While raising the taboo activity of incest between father and daughter, Kimenye also draws attention to the issue of the male re-construction of the female as whore or prostitute, as discussed in Chapter 3. Thus, just as Kazzora perceives Pamela in *The Runaway Bride* as a prostitute figure because of the combination of her looks and behaviour, so Adela's single act of entering a beauty contest invites males to similarly re-position her. The local boys she has grown up with consequently regard her as a sex object, which leads 'to touching and groping' when she re-positions herself as a

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<sup>98</sup> See *Gay Uganda*, <http://www.geocities.com/gayuganda/> [accessed 10 September 2009].

<sup>99</sup> Kimenye, *Beauty Queen*, p.4.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.



beauty contestant.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, her father's re-construction of her as the prostitute figure leads to a fatherly transgression of accepted normative male behaviour that is so taboo that not even Adela's mother is willing to acknowledge his attempted violation of their daughter. In raising this taboo, Kimenye also comments upon the practice adopted by some African fathers to avoid contracting HIV Aids, thus transgressing social and cultural boundaries to illustrate both the existence of incest and a contemporary motive for some who commit it. However, rather than being perceived in the light of a breaking of taboos that is met with the comfortable option of a disregarding silence, Kimenye's voicing of these issues is better understood in terms of an attempt at consciousness raising. The act of bringing such contemporary issues into the open can be more effectively interpreted as Kimenye's attempt to prompt discussion and bring about change to the current situation, as she perceives it.

The corruption of Adela continues when Ujeni prostitutes her for financial gain by placing her in the hands of Joe Banda. Preying upon her naivety and innocence, Joe Banda is representative of a Fagin-like character in that his concern is to make money from her, and this he does through the male commodification of her beauty.<sup>102</sup> Hence, a parallel can be drawn here between my discussions in Chapter 3 of Ogot's depiction of the notion of the male re-construction of woman as an article to be bought. In this respect, Kimenye shows how, in the hands of the male, Adela is turned into a commodity to be used and abused; sullied and dirtied; corrupted through drugs, drink and sex until death.<sup>103</sup>

Corruption and commodification of the child is a theme that is also evident in *Prettyboy, Beware* as Kimenye unmasks the practice of child prostitution. In the context of this text, she exposes the vulnerability of young Africans, and in particular young African males, let down by their own socio-political system. When Matthew finds himself alone in the world, he has no alternative but to occupy a new and unknown space in order to survive. Thus:

Matthew was badly shaken. What sort of people, including Mark, were these new acquaintances? He was too young to grasp the idea of a depraved section of society flourishing unseen alongside that which he was brought up to regard as normal, and once more he had the impression of being flung into a new, frightening world.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>102</sup> Fagin is a character in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp.65-83.



Nodding in the direction of a small girl who was sitting on the lap of an elderly man and giggling as he tickled her, Matthew asked, "What about her? How did she get here?"

Daniel glanced carelessly at the child and shrugged. "The same as the rest of us, I guess. I told you, when you're hungry, you don't have a choice. Most of these kids were born on the streets and are pitched out to beg as soon as they can walk."

Seeing Matthew grimace with distaste, he snapped, "Stop being so pious, Prettyboy! You were with Mark, so I know you're no better than we are. And if you want money, there's only one way for you to earn it – unless you're thinking of robbing a bank!"<sup>104</sup>

In this passage, Kimenye shows that the new acquaintances Matthew becomes involved with are not Africans. Rather, they are alien Western predators who recognise an opportunity to exploit African street children for sexual gratification and, in the case of Spencer, financial gain, by taking advantage of the holes in African law enforcement and the lack of protection given to African minors.

Clearly, the issues of Aids and homosexuality propel Kimenye into the political arena, and yet it is significant that there remains an absence of any published critique or analysis of these texts by Kiyimba - who distinctly acknowledges the texts should not be ignored - and other critics. Their reticence to engage with Kimenye's texts testifies to the general reluctance of African scholars, or anyone else, to form an association with these polemical texts. This state of affairs is indicative of the level of Kimenye's transgression of boundaries in relation to her readers. Thus, Mushengyezi comments that Kimenye 'is bringing a taboo area into the open for debate and that constitutes transgression of tradition and it's bound to be frowned upon by the reader.'<sup>105</sup> It would appear, however, that not only is Kimenye's attempt to breakdown taboo areas frowned upon, but also it is simply not tolerated as indicated by the general disregard with which *Beauty Queen* and *Prettyboy, Beware* have been met. In *Prettyboy, Beware*, speaking of how the act of homosexuality can affect children, Kimenye states that 'the remedy lies in tougher laws for the protection of children and their rights'.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, this text is so challenging that even when she lays bare her political agenda it is apparently unheeded. It should be noted that she does not campaign for any specific acknowledgement of homosexual activity amongst Africans, rather for greater discussion of the plight of children forced into homosexual activities, recognition of the need for tougher laws relating to child abuse,

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<sup>104</sup> Kimenye, *Prettyboy, Beware*, pp.89-90.

<sup>105</sup> Interview between Elizabeth F. Oldfield and Aaron Mushengyezi.

<sup>106</sup> Kimenye, *Prettyboy, Beware*, 'Introduction'.



and ultimately some positive action in the form of greater protection for children. Similarly, in *Beauty Queen* she states:

“Single Grazing” with no wandering into pastures new, is a commendable slogan in Uganda’s campaign against Aids. But did you realise that in countries with ever-rising percentages of HIV-carriers, “single grazing” offers no guarantee that one of the partners in a faithful relationship is not already and unknowingly HIV positive?<sup>107</sup>

While applauding an approach that aims to slow down the spread of Aids, Kimenye simultaneously highlights the general ignorance that continues to surround this deadly disease. Turning a blind eye may be the African inclination, but her implication is that, as with the problem of homosexuality and child prostitution, education and openness are paramount in tackling this scourge. To this end - openness and education - Kimenye’s boundary crossings become less about taboos and more about educating and encouraging society to face up to and deal with contemporary issues.

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<sup>107</sup> Kimenye, *Beauty Queen*, ‘Introduction’.

## 6. Conclusion

The combination of writers under analysis in this thesis, coupled with the heterogeneous nature of (black) African women's experiences and identities, dictated a specific theoretical approach, thereby ensuring that the mind was always open to the multiple meanings contained within the selected texts. Shifting away from a totalising reading system that would have effectively limited and closed down meanings and interpretations, it was necessary to embrace an alternative approach that would both reflect the complex and multiple identities of the 'African' women subjects of this study, and encourage a variety of readings of their texts. The ensuing theoretical framework therefore juxtaposed aspects of black feminist theorising, postcolonial theory, and the theory of Signification - which emphasises an African approach to writing and signifies differently to the European literary tradition. My arguments were further emphasized throughout by an engagement with contexts pertaining to the authors' lives, African feminism, cultural and representational politics, and the literary and publishing context of East African children's writing. In addition, taking account of the disparate hybrid identities of Huxley, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot, I recognised that these very identities formed an inextricable link with the notion of the 'stranger' and its binary opposite 'indigenous', and the associated idea of the transgression of spatial boundaries. This led me to explore the African-centred concepts of the term 'woman' in Luganda, Acholi (or Acoli), Dholuo and Gikuyu, and to propose the existence of a conceptual link to African women's transgression of boundaries, particularly in relation to the space they occupy.

The writers under analysis in this thesis purport to adopt an African perspective. However, it was found that the space they occupy differs because the varying contexts of their lives impact upon, and affect their spatial relations. This fact prompted an analysis of the dialectics of space pertaining to the subjects and their texts, and an examination of their associated transgression of boundaries as they related to gender, identity, culture and the 'Other'. Whilst attempting to adopt an African perspective in *Red Strangers*, Huxley effectively demonstrates that, whilst she is capable of creating characters that merge aspects of Western and African cultures to occupy a new and progressive Third Space, this is not the space she occupies herself. Rather, she keeps a foot in each camp to bestride two different cultures resulting in



her own occupation of an in-between space. This is indicated by her switching back and forth between narrative points of view in her body of works, but further, by her projection of Eurocentric opinions onto the Gikuyu society while endeavouring to step into their shoes and write like an African. She therefore perpetuates Eurocentric stereotypes of Africans, in so doing highlighting her (un)conscious voyages into the European diaspora in Africa to show that she is more bound up with racial categories and the past than she may wish to admit.

While analysis has found that Huxley positioned herself as traveller/visitor/stranger, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot live(d) as indigenous members of African societies. Interpellated into the Luo culture but brought up listening to both Christian Bible stories and traditional Luo narratives, Ogot marries aspects of these two cultures to enter into the Third Space. This is reinforced by her political career, which is a space that tradition constructs as a male preserve. Hence, she negotiates the contact zone created by her occupation of a space that is traditionally constructed as male, whilst as a wife and mother, she also crosses geographical borders to enter into the contact zone and thence the space constructed as hers at her husband's home and amongst his people. Ogot's cultural hybridity and occupation of the Third Space is thus perceptible in her presentation of selected characters so that in *The Graduate* we recognise the juggling that is a consequence of the conflict between normative femininity and occupation of a male space. Furthermore, her representation of Ochola in *The Promised Land* illustrates a hybridised character that successfully occupies the Third Space, thereby contesting Young's claim relating to what he refers to as the imaginary distance between past and the present. Nevertheless, through her portrayal of specifically African characters, she bears witness to her own essentially African identity.

By contrast, the context of Kimenye's life results in her racial and cultural hybridity since it is informed by European and African influences. Her father's African identity, coupled with her experiences in Uganda as an adult, allow her the liberty to construct an identity that she regards Ugandan by birth. Kimenye's *kizungu* imagination is important and as a result her writing is an example of a new textuality that combines European and African influences to transgress the traditional narrative boundaries of both. This results in a textuality that is culturally innovative, revolutionary and transgressive. Thus, hybridity is apparent in her presentation of African characters in an African setting that draw on popular European stereotypes.



Furthermore, Kimenye employs culturally hybrid characters who reside in the Third Space to illustrate the notion of an inclusive African hybrid society.

Macgoye re-negotiates her identity in order to successfully integrate into her husband's Luo culture, and in so doing enters the new Third Space and contradicts concerns about the ability of an outsider to successfully inhabit a culture other than the one inherited at birth. The hybridity of her own life finds expression in *Coming to Birth*, where she writes herself into the narrative in a small way, giving rise to the notion that she uses narrative as a way to endeavour to write place, home, location and self. Like Macgoye, the un-named character in this text also assimilates into Luo culture, thereby crossing over consciousnesses and occupying the Third Space. Further, the character of Paulina re-negotiates and reconfigures her identity, transgressing boundaries of normative feminine behaviour along the way in order to negotiate and ultimately occupy a modern space in a newly independent Kenya.

In deliberately re-positioning themselves to write from an African perspective, and in particular, an African woman's perspective, it was found that the writers transgress boundaries relating to Orientalist discourse and the dominant African patriarchal discourse. Hence, analysis discovered that the deliberate strategic relocation of Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot facilitated their re-presentation of African female characters. Patriarchal structures within some societies in Africa construct normative African feminine behaviour and in so doing refuses the woman the liberty 'to play as well as anybody else.'<sup>1</sup> However, in creating various autonomous female characters that reject their traditionally constructed normative feminine space and refuse to be rooted, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot adopt an alternative political stance to the ideology of patriarchy that dominates most African societies, thereby indicating women's ability to route themselves, and their innate tendency towards transgression of male constructed boundaries of normative feminine behaviour. By combining the notion that female travel is related to transgression, with an exploration of a variety of African-centred concepts for the term 'woman', it was possible to demonstrate a conceptual link to the space occupied by the African woman and her transgressive behaviour. In turn, this enabled me to highlight that the writers' presentation of autonomous, hence transgressive female characters, form a direct connection with the literal meanings of the selected African terms for 'woman'. In contrast to the other

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<sup>1</sup> Elvania Namukwaya Zirimu, 'The Hen and the Groundnuts', in *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology*, ed. by David Cook (London: Heinemann, 1965), pp. 137 – 139 (p. 138).



writers, however, Huxley's lack of concentration upon female characters in *Red Strangers*, and subsequent female representations highlight that her actual strategic location differs from her intended location because her perspective continues to be informed by Eurocentric values. Consequently, she is unable to present the African woman anew. Rather, she is content with portraying a very brief image of the female, mainly consisting of rituals affecting the Gikuyu woman's life cycle. However, Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot are successful in their strategic re-location due to a representation of the African woman that comprises privileging facets of the African woman's life cycle and experience, giving voice to female characters and illustrating the phenomenon of nego-feminism, and presenting the prostitute figure anew.

Analysis of the subjects of this study and their texts dictated an engagement with the contentious topic of African feminisms in an effort to delineate the position of the African woman. Traditionally, the dominant African male discourse constructs the African woman as the silent and passive 'Other'. This is a myth. Nevertheless, although Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot acknowledge it as such, they are reluctant to identify with African feminisms and hence assume the condition of alterity, which emanates from their persistent refusal of evidence to suggest their preoccupation with feminist issues and concerns. What is apparent, nevertheless, is that storytelling provides these three writers with a legitimate public space to use their voice, and that their privileged public status within African society enables them to reach a wide audience. Their role as storyteller therefore allows compliance with African patriarchal constructs of normative femininity whilst enabling achievement of female power due to their textual voicing of feminist concerns. However, whilst feminist elements are evident in the fiction of Kimenye, Macgoye and Ogot, and they create female characters that exhibit behaviours that do not conform to normative femininity, their concern is not with women's rights *per se*, but rather they are preoccupied with the championing of women's rights. This sounds contradictory, particularly in view of the fact that I have proposed previously that they adopt a political stance because of their involvement in cultural and representational politics. Yet account must be taken of the climate within which they reside, and acknowledgement that the notions of feminism and women's rights still carry with them revolutionary and radical connotations in many African communities. To suggest their interest and involvement in the championing of women's rights, by contrast, offers an acceptable and alternative approach to anything with the label 'feminism', and incorporates the

whole African community, female and male. Finally, I explored the suggestion that children's writing offered the 'African' woman writer the opportunity to find a voice and an identity while seemingly both conforming to, and subverting, the African notion of normative femininity. Analysis of the East African literary and publishing context out of which Kimenye and Macgoye's children's writing emerges supports this notion, whilst testifying to their boundary crossings due to the absence at that time of published texts for African children written in English. Applying the concept of Signifyin(g) to Kimenye and Macgoye's children's narratives allowed me to demonstrate their (un)conscious voyages into European literary spaces through their intertextual African Signifyin(g) upon Blyton's *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* series, and Crompton's *Just William* stories, resulting in their associated transgression of boundaries relating to the Eurocentric texts refigured. Furthermore, I demonstrated that in repeating and refiguring experiences such as the African boarding school system and exposure to corruption, for example, which are familiar to those readers with a shared African cultural heritage, Kimenye and Macgoye were able to subvert their normative role of storyteller to incorporate a hidden polemic. Additionally, I highlighted how Kimenye transgresses cultural boundaries through her Signification on the image of the African street child and the notion of the European beauty queen in an attempt to promote a polemical message relating to African society's tendency to ignore issues believed to have emanated from contact with Europe. Kimenye attempts to bring issues like HIV/Aids and outdated/ignored laws relating to the issue of child abuse to the forefront for discussion and should therefore not be dismissed lightly. However, these specific texts, much like the rest of the literature by Kimenye and Macgoye written for African children, has been largely ignored. This is an area that this thesis was unable to cover fully or to any great depth and therefore represents an area for possible future research and development.



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